



The Educator and the Quest for Higher Quality

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ABSTRACT

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BACKGROUND. Since the quest for quality in higher education began, the Norwegian government has introduced and implemented several white papers to the Norwegian parliament, the Storting. These papers aim to enhance the higher education sector through building strong research communities and raising the quality of the teaching provided to students in order to fulfil the need for an educated and skilled supply of labour.

PURPOSE. This study's objective is to create an essential document to help Nord University and Centre for Learning and Technology to plan for and facilitate educators to develop their teaching and/or meet the requirements of the white paper "Culture for Quality in Higher Education" St. Meld. 16 (2016-2017) after listening to the voice of the educator.

METHODOLOGY. The research data were collected from narrative stories written by seven informants who are all educators at Nord University. They were asked to write an informal text about how it is to be an educator in higher education. The written material was then used in a narrative thematic analysis.

RESULTS. The informants of this study differ from the assumed image of educators in higher education, as they seem to be ardent teachers who enjoy teaching, like being a teacher and use student-centred teaching. They report that they find themselves experiencing cross-pressure between what they want to do regarding teaching and what is expected of them from faculty/institutions and the effects of structural reforms implemented in the name of higher quality.

CONCLUSION. In order to facilitate higher-quality teaching, we need to make use of the resources available and hence need to use educators that are passionate and up-to-date to educate and help their peers by creating incentives that succeed. We also need to allocate time to perform development work, which requires examining the use of digitalisation and the shift of work from non-academic to academic staff and the effects of significant structural changes.

Key words: higher education, teaching, student-centred, facilitation for development work, trinity of teaching quality, university pedagogy, reforms

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
ICT	information and communication technology
KOLT	Kompetansesenter for læring og teknologi /Centre for Learning and Technology, at Nord University
NOKUT	Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanninga / the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
UHR	Universitets- og høgskolerådet / Universities Norway
Diku	Direktoratet for internasjonalisering og kvalitetsutvikling i høgare utdanning/The Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education
NPM	New Public Management
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HiNT	Høgskolen i Nord-Trøndelag/University college of Nord-Trøndelag
LMS	Learning Management system

1 INTRODUCTION

The educator represents a vital part of the quality chain in higher education. In recent years, both national and international bodies have worked to raise the quality of education provide in higher education. There are also guidelines from parties with an interest in higher education. Since 48 countries signed the Bologna Process in 1999, efforts have been made toward increasing both student and staff mobility and facilitating employability. The Bologna Process regarded a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries with the purpose to align the quality and standards of higher education. In Norway, in recent years the government has enacted several reforms to enhance the quality of higher education. They introduced a large structural reform called “Concentration for Quality – structural reform in the university and university college sector” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015), which led to many merges to larger units to provide a vaster base of qualified academic staff in different subjects/areas of research/fields of study. This reform was continued with a whitepaper called “Quality Culture in Higher Education Meld. St. 16 (2016-17)” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016), in which they outline how the teaching should be provided.

This thesis is part of a research-based development project at the Centre for learning and technology (KOLT) at Nord University. One of the main tasks of KOLT is to facilitate educators regarding learning design, pedagogy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in their teaching with the goal to deliver better education for university students. The educator is thus of interest, however unfortunately little is known about them and there seems to be many assumptions regarding how they think, act and what they need. The goal of this thesis is to get to know educators in higher education and thereby help the KOLT team, and possibly the university management, to deliver a better service or identify incentives that help educators deliver higher-quality teaching according the demands in governmental papers.

The annual student survey conducted by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) showed that in 2015, 90% of students reported

that traditional lecture represents the dominant teaching method in higher-education institutions (HEI). It has been 20 years since the Bologna Process began and 15 years since the three-level degree program was introduced in Norway. Biggs and Tang (2011) wrote about constructive alignment and teaching towards learning outcomes. These outcomes are defined and form the basis for the assessment, but there is still much progress to be made before the learning activities mirror both the assessment and learning outcomes. As stated previously, the objective of this thesis is to learn more about educators at Nord University. Since there seems to be a mismatch between the demands of official documents and regulations of the educator and what is delivered regarding desired teaching strategies, it will be interesting to know more about the educators' views on the matters.

The research question for this thesis is thus as follows:

What kind of reflections does the educator at Nord University make regarding his/her teaching and student-centred teaching, and are there traces of the official policy regarding quality in higher education in their reflections?

The sub-questions are:

- What is quality in higher education?
- What are the incentives for working towards higher quality?
- What are the enablers and obstacles for the improvement of quality?

2 THE QUALITY CHAIN AND THE EDUCATOR

Is the quality of the education solely the responsibility of the teacher entering the lecture hall facing the students demanding an education? According to an official report (Mjøs & Norges Kirke utdannings-og forskningsdepartementet Utvalget for høgre utdanning, 2000), the quality chain in higher education can be divided into 4 elements that would impact the quality:

- Quality of the admission: understood as the institution's ability regarding recruitment and selection, the student's qualification and how the students are welcomed to the study program
- Quality of the framework: described as the technical, organisational, administrative, social and welfare issues within a comprehensive learning environment
- **Quality of the study programs: described as the quality in study plans as well as in the organisation and implementation of teaching and learning**
- Quality of the outcome: understood as the student achievement and learning outcomes in relation to the student's objectives as well as the candidate's degree of success in the labour market

In this thesis, the focus lies on the third bullet point.

2.1 Concentration for Quality

“Concentration for Quality: Structural reform in the university and university college sector” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015) is a white paper from the Norwegian government that was written and implemented in recent years in higher education with the purpose of elevating the quality of higher education.

The goals of the white paper, also known as “the structural reform”, include the following:

- Education and research of high quality
- Robust research communities
- Access to education and competencies in every part of the country
- World-leading research communities
- Efficient use of resources

This is not the first structural reform that the government has implemented; in 1994 a significant structural reform occurred, by which Norway went from having 98 public university colleges to 26 larger units of university colleges. The goal back then, as now, was to be able to run the institutions more efficiently in the spirit of New Public Management (NPM), with the belief that larger units are better and more efficient than smaller ones (Solhaug, 2011). Bleiklie (2018) states that prior to the 1990s, the leadership and decision-making in higher education were performed by the “republic of scholars”, meaning that they were based on collegial decisions made by independent scholars. In recent years, Bleiklie (2018) indicates that the leadership of HEIs is considering the institutions as corporate enterprises, hence the basis for strategic decisions being the satisfaction of major stakeholders’ interests and the voice of academics being just one among several parties.

This shift in perspective seems to be influenced by NPM, as the government wants to introduce market mechanisms in the public sector to gain more from each penny used. The number of institutions and significant increase of students from the 60s onwards led to a rise of costs used towards higher education, which led to reforms of the sector. After the introduction of NPM in higher education, merges of HEIs have occurred all across Europe with the goal to ensure greater value for money and additional productivity (Ferlie, Musselin, & Andresani, 2009). Bleiklie (2018) points to five areas that have been reformed in recent years due to the NPM trend: systemic integration, decision-making, funding, quality assurance/evaluation and work organisation.

After the latest reform, Norway now has 10 universities, 6 university colleges and 5 scientific university colleges. There are also quite a few privately owned institutions and 17 receive grants from the government. Funding was also a subject of reforms, as previously the higher educational institutions received funding as direct allocations from the state based upon input factors such as number of faculty and students enrolled. Now there is:

(a) less detailed government regulation of institutional budgets; (b) funding is increasingly based on output indicators (e.g., number of students finishing their degrees, number and impact of research publications) rather than input; and (c) dependency on additional external funding for research activities. (Bleiklie, 2018, p. 3)

Regarding decision-making, Bleiklie (2018) states that the leadership of the institutions operates more in a cooperate manner, from academic bottom-up towards chief executives making top-down decisions. The institutions tend to be more interested in satisfying stakeholders such as governmental QA-bodies and economic demands from the board of directors. After 2002, the individual board of each institution became responsible for the use of their total block grant, which provides each institution with a large degree of autonomy to decide what type of activity and areas to prioritise.

2.2 Quality Culture in Higher Education

Quality Culture in Higher Education is a white paper submitted to the Norwegian parliament, the Storting, regarding how Norway can raise the quality of higher education and was written by the Ministry of Education and Research. In this white paper, the ministry outlines several measures to enhance the quality of teaching. In the introduction, the ministry states:

teaching excellence should not depend on a few individual pedagogical enthusiasts while status and resources are rewarded primarily to the foremost researchers. Rather, educational quality must be the responsibility of the academic environment as a whole, including the

academic leadership. Every teacher has the capacity to develop their pedagogical methods and inspire their students. Good teaching is a craft that can be learnt. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016, p. 2)

The goals of the white paper are that the given study programmes must be both demanding and engaging to the students and that the students be regarded as responsible for their own learning. The institutions must still help the students to become integrated in both the social and academic environments. The study programmes should be aligned with clear learning objectives and utilise varied and stimulating learning and assessment methods that use digital opportunities. The institutions must develop study programmes in collaboration with the working life to ensure that what is taught is what is needed. The teachers in higher education should have proficient academic and pedagogical competence. The last goal is that in the future academia must value teaching and education higher than before.

The ministry states in this white paper that in the future there will be no difference in status between an excellent researcher and an excellent teacher, as they will be regarded and appreciated in the same way. Academic staff has a long tradition in achieving higher status by conducting research and writing papers to be published, and this tradition is still alive and nurtured in academia. An institution that wants to retain their status as a university must have a certain amount of staff with a PhD or higher, and they need to publish a certain number of articles based on research. It is no secret that this focus on research has led to less focus on teaching. There has previously been no requirements regarding knowledge about pedagogy and learning theories among the academic staff when hiring staff. The employee was required, within a period of time, to attend a course delivering university and university college pedagogical basic skills. This lack of pedagogical focus has probably led to lecturers providing poorly designed teachings, mostly in the form of lectures in a lecture hall.

Fossland (2016) explains that it is important to reveal the different perspectives on quality, because understanding the whole picture allows one to use incentives to enhance the quality, whether by the government or the educator. There is no single element that determines quality but rather an interaction between different elements, as illustrated in Figure 1.

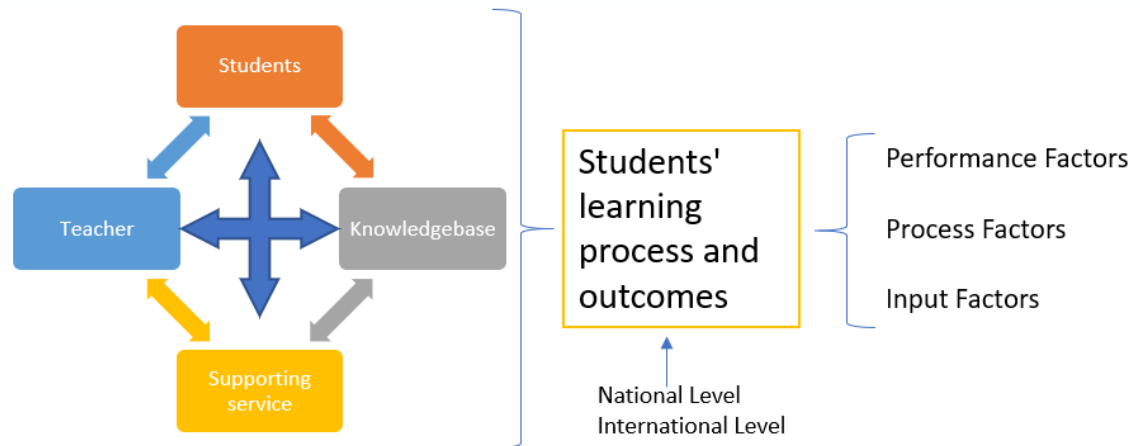


FIGURE 1. Multidimensional interaction between different actors / elements modified from (Bråten & Børsheim, 2016).

In the white paper, the Ministry states that it is not only the quality of delivered teachings that matters regarding quality, it is one of many factors as shown in Figure 2.

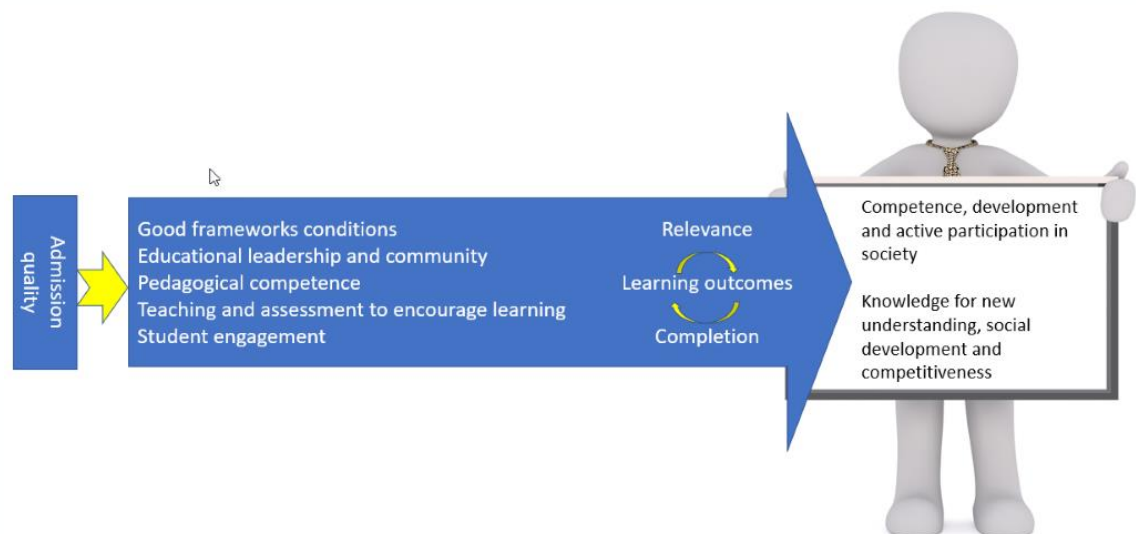


FIGURE 2. Factors that have relevance for quality in higher education.

According to the Ministry, “the most important factor is the student’s engagement, the amount of time they spend on their studies and how they spend that time” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016, p. 13).

Two factors that directly regard the academic staff include pedagogical competence and teaching as well as assessment to encourage learning, hence “students must receive teaching, feedback and assessment that is energising and engaging, that is based on research and that clearly corresponds to the set learning outcomes” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016, p. 24). In greater detail, the Ministry states that the academic staff must use learning and assessment methods that provide students in-depth learning and enable them to achieve the learning outcomes set in the study programmes. In section 3.4 (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2016) in the Norwegian issue of the white paper, the Ministry states that research shows that traditional lectures do not necessarily provide the highest learning outcomes, and they recommend the use of more student-active teaching and learning methods such as problem-based, case-based and exploratory learning. They mention that using a flipped-classroom and publishing content for instance in the learning management system (LMS) in the form of a video or a podcast frees teacher resources towards student contact and discussions when students attend a class. The white paper states that teachers arranging and assisting students reflecting on professional issues will help them integrate into the academic community, increase their motivation and commitment and promote critical thinking.

2.3 Support services

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) ensures the quality of higher education by supervising and accrediting the institutions delivering study programs, which ensures the programs are aligned with the governmental rules and regulations. NOKUT evaluates the institutions and their deliverables as well as performs research and analyses in order to help the institutions deliver higher quality education; for instance, they perform a yearly survey among students and recently began a yearly survey among teachers. The results of these surveys provide input to the institutions regarding what the students/teachers are satisfied with and which areas they seek improvements.

The Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (Diku) is owned by the Ministry of Education and Research

and also works for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Commission and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The aim of the agency is to strengthen the quality of Norwegian education by promoting development and innovation, international cooperation and digital learning by administrating different incentives schemes. Teachers may apply for grants from Diku that enable research regarding their own teaching or aspects of it.

Directorate for ICT and Joint Services in Higher Education & Research (Unit) provides a wide range of research and higher education services and plays a central role in enforce and integrate the government's digitisation policy. The research and higher education sectors need to utilise new technology to streamline, improve quality and ensure access to knowledge. The Unit combines the forces that will contribute to the digitisation of Norwegian universities and colleges.

Universities Norway (UHR) regards a cooperative body of 33 accredited universities and university colleges. The aim for this council is to promote the interests of universities and university colleges, contribute to the coordination and division of labour in the sector and create favourable meeting places for universities and university colleges, national authorities and other national and international actors. Norway utilises a dual model in higher education, where the university colleges have traditionally delivered vocational training and professions (e.g., teacher training, nursing, engineering etc.), whilst the universities have had a larger focus on research and scientific approaches in their courses. In later years this has changed due to the ongoing quest for quality and mergers between universities and university colleges. Today, UHR has 33 member institutions: 10 universities, 9 scientific university colleges and 14 university colleges.

Most universities and university colleges in Norway have their own support unit, which greatly vary regarding their place in the organisational structure and their focus of support. These units support topics such as the use of ICT, teaching and research. Some units are well established with a clear mandate, while other are new and hence more ambiguous in purpose and still trying to clarify their own mandate. At the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference in Bergen this fall, members from approximately 20 institutions of higher education in Norway met for the first time with the purpose to

find ways to do exchange of experience in the future. These units provide primary support to academic staff and also advice to administration and leadership.

2.4 Means to ensure quality in Norwegian higher education

Both white papers outline different means to ensure the quality of higher education in Norway, and in the following section some are described.

2.4.1 Measurements of quality in “Concentration for Quality”

In this white paper (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2015), the government states that the quality and resilience of HEIs must be measured by the following criteria:

- The number of man-labour years with competence as an associate professor
- Application for higher education – student recruitment says something about the attractiveness for the education and the opportunity for robust academic environments
- Implementation in higher education
- Students’ time spent, reported in the Study Barometer, the national student survey
- Publication, i.e., the number of publication points at the institutions and the various academic environments, publication points per academic position and whether they are published in international channels
- External research revenues for the Research Council and the EU
- Size of the doctoral programs, i.e., the number of doctoral students and the number of doctorates awarded
- International orientation, i.e., international cooperation in the form of joint research projects and co-publications, joint education programs and student exchange

- Interaction with society, i.e., contribution and mission-financed activity, number of commercialisation and scope of continuing education.

The quality assurance of these criteria is performed by NOKUT.

2.4.2 The use of constructive alignment

The idea of constructive alignment, as presented by Biggs and Tang (2011), is present in the report called Quality Culture in Higher Education, which discusses the study program learning outcomes, assessment and teaching. The Ministry desires education that energises and engages students.

Biggs and Tang (2011) refer to “Academic Susan” and “Non-academic Robert” and how the student mass has changed over the years. In many Western countries, more and more students enter higher education not necessarily because they are eager to study but because they need a degree to acquire a job. The motivation to study differs between “Susan” and “Robert”, as “Susan” wants to study and has high inner motivation. In contrast, “Robert” has more outer, controlled motivation and wants a job, and the studying is merely a means to reach this goal. According to Ed Deci (TEDxTalks, 2012), motivation is the “energy for action”, and without the correct fuel, one will not achieve the desired outcome. When the Ministry states that only 4 out of 10 students complete their bachelor’s degree according to plan, it might be a sign of a need to examine how to provide the correct fuel to students.

Biggs and Tang (2011) state that through engagement through activity, the level of learning outcomes can be increased, as shown in Figure 3. When students are passive, despite the low activity, Susan will be able to achieve a high level of taxonomy since she has a high inner motivation that makes her engage with the subject matter. On the other hand, Robert will not be able to motivate himself to engage in activities other than memorising and note taking, and hence he will not be able to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

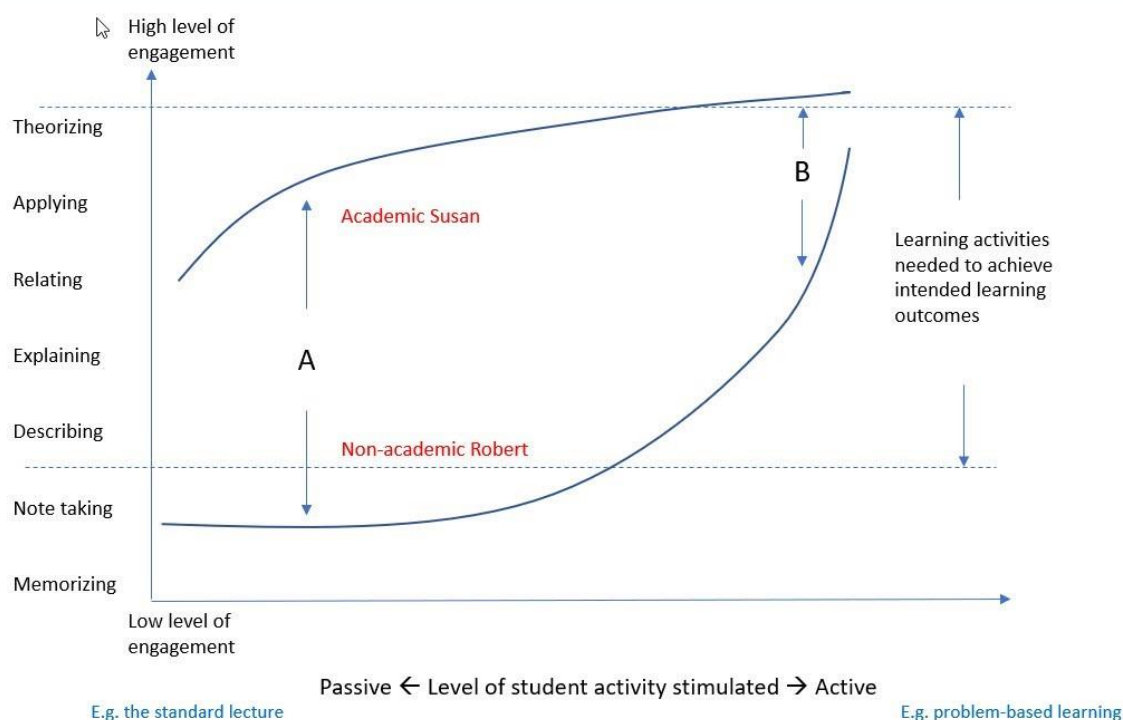


FIGURE 3. Biggs hypothetical graph showing student orientation, teaching method and level of engagement, modified from Biggs and Tang (2011)

If the teacher chooses another method of teaching such as problem-based learning, Robert will be forced to use higher-order cognitive activities to solve the task. According to Biggs, Susan is performing these activities on her own spontaneously. The use of activities will close the gap between Susan and Robert. Biggs and Tang (2011, p. 7) state that “good teaching is getting most students to use the level of cognitive processes needed to achieve the intended outcomes that the more academic students use spontaneously”.

In Norway, NOKUT monitors the development of study programs and grants accreditation to study programs and institutions, recognition of study programmes and subject area accreditation at tertiary vocational levels. Norwegian universities and university colleges are responsible for ensuring that the study programmes they offer are of high quality, and quality audits are conducted through internal systems for quality assurance of the education. NOKUT supervises the institutions' quality-assurance practices. In the regulations on the supervision of educational quality in higher education (2017), § 2-2-5 says “Teaching, learning and assessment forms must be adapted to the learning outcomes of the study program”. When describing each course they offer, the institutions must also list the

expected learning outcome, learning objectives, learning activities and type of assessment. There is clear influence from constructive alignment, whose three parts, as shown in Figure 4, must be in place to fulfil the demands of quality expected of a study program.

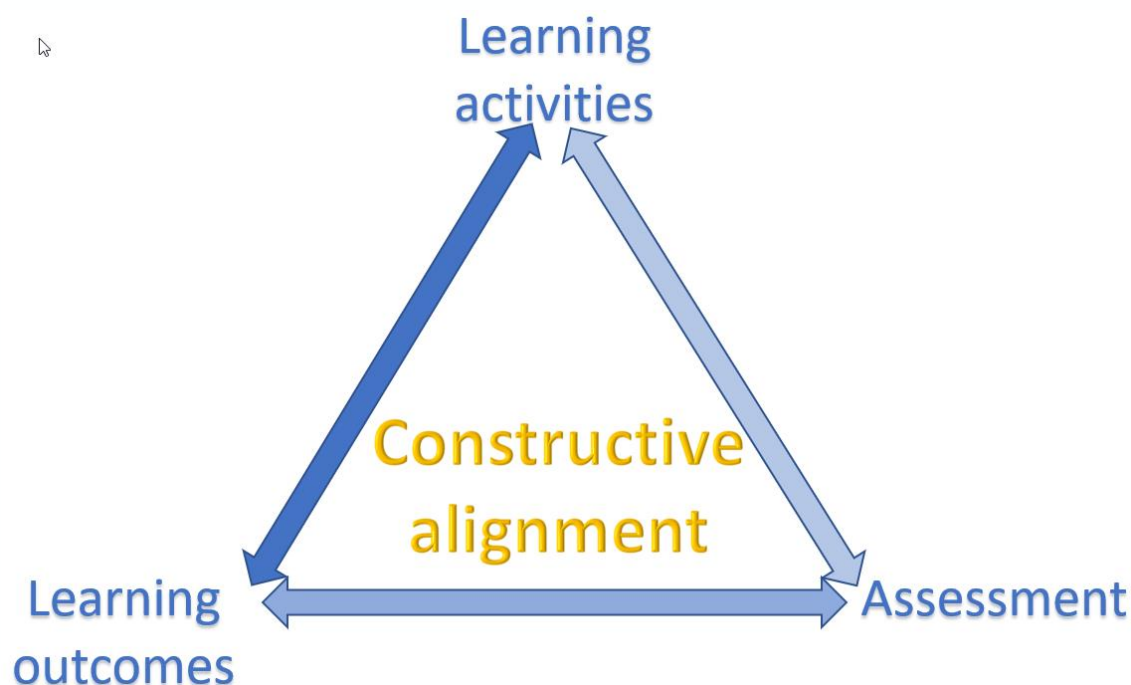


FIGURE 4. The Trinity of Constructive Alignment, based upon Biggs (2011)

2.4.3 The use of SOLO taxonomy

SOLO taxonomy (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome) (Biggs, 2018) regards a method of classifying learning outcomes based upon their complexity, from a low level of understanding to a high level of understanding, where the student is able to use the new understanding to generalise to a new domain.

The degree to which the SOLO taxonomy is officially implemented in higher education in Norway, as described by Biggs (2018), is not easy to determine. One finds words from the SOLO taxonomy (Biggs, 2018) in the descriptions of the expected learning outcomes, but it is unclear how much the taxonomy is used to create a rubric to assess the students' work. Universities Norway (2011) have provided a general qualitative description of the grade system that all institutions must use.

According to the guidelines from the UHR regarding assessment, the attainment of learning outcome must form the basis of the evaluation. When browsing several different university sites online, there were few traces of the SOLO taxonomy, as every study program has described the expected learning outcome yet little was found regarding assessment. The Ministry of Education and Research has approved and published a document about levels and learning outcome descriptors (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012) on their website, which describes the verbs that help detect the level of attained learning outcomes the student has reached.

2.5 Incentives to reach the goals

The government has intentions to establish incentives to ensure that the goals in the report are reached. Firstly, they have begun to implement a pedagogical merit system to encourage additional focus and status towards teaching and to ensure that important developments occur regarding teaching and research on different teaching and learning methods. This work has begun, but the goal has not yet been achieved across all higher education in Norway. Some institutions have experimented and trialled different merit systems, but there is no unified system in place for all academic staff that want to get their teaching merited. In some cases, some teachers have become members of different cross-institutional centres for excellence in education, which were administered by NOKUT since 2010 but was transferred to Diku at beginning of 2019. When awarded this status for excellent quality and innovative practises, the centres will receive a sum of money and must share their results and knowledge.

Secondly, through Diku the government has made it possible for academic staff to apply for grants to research different topics regarding teaching methods, the use of ICT and how to develop study programs. These grants support both smaller projects that run over 2 years and larger projects that run for 3 years. For example, this year they have 40 million NOK that will contribute to projects to develop, test, evaluate and use student-active teaching and learning methods over a 3-year period.

As of September 1st, 2019, the Ministry of Education and Research has strengthened the requirements for the educational competence of persons to be employed in teaching positions at Norwegian universities and colleges, including competence in teaching. In order to meet this requirement, one needs to have taken a course of 10 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits in university pedagogy. At Nord University, the goal of the course is to enable the participants to contribute to the university becoming a better educational institution through the collaboration, discussion and management of learning-promoting measures.

2.6 What about the teacher?

In 2017 NOKUT conducted its first survey among academic staff regarding educational quality. The national teacher survey's main findings show that the majority of teachers in Norwegian higher education are satisfied with the quality of the study program they teach. They are most happy with the content of the study program, their own competence and ability to engage and motivate students. They are least satisfied with the time they have at their disposal and with other resources regarding teaching and feedback, support from the study program management and the students' prerequisites (Lid, Pedersen, & Damen, 2018).

The teachers report that they are reasonably satisfied with the learning outcomes such as the knowledge, skills and competencies the students acquire during the study program, however the survey indicates that many teachers believe it is possible to further enhance the learning outcomes. They say that, to a large extent, they use student-active teaching methods, varied teaching and learning strategies and provide guidance and feedback to the students (Lid et al., 2018).

The teachers claim to contribute to a relatively large extent to discussions about the implementation and development of degree programs. They actively motivate the students and teach topics that are relevant to their professional skills. They express that they to a lesser extent have sufficient time to prepare the teaching

,and many teachers believe that they receive little feedback and support from the study program management (Lid et al., 2018).

One finding from the survey (Lid et al., 2018) is that in many study programs, the teachers find that the student material is becoming more and more heterogenous regarding their required prerequisite knowledge. The most satisfied in this area were teachers within architecture, medicine and dentistry, which all regard study programs with a high threshold. Students that want to enrol in these programs must have favourable grades to be admitted to these courses, and there will thus be few “Roberts” among these students.

When teachers were asked about their educational education, the survey revealed that the largest group (46%) has university and university-college pedagogical basic skills, 17% have practical pedagogical education, 9% have teacher education and 14% stated that they have different educational education. 27% stated that they do not have any formal educational qualifications. (Lid et al., 2018). When nearly 50% of the teachers might potentially have only basic pedagogical skills, this low competence could affect how the teachers answer the questions about teaching and learning strategies they use. This is because a lack of competence will make s/he understand the questions in a certain way; for example, when asked about the extent to which they agree with the statement “I use teaching and working methods that stimulate students to participate actively in discussion”, an educator with low competence who allows questions or asks students questions during a lecture will potentially agree to a large extent. In contrast, an educator with high competence who uses the same method would agree to a low extent.

2.7 No magical formula for educational quality

In the years since the Bologna Process started, many alterations have occurred in the higher-education sector at the macro level in Norway. The structure of the country’s study programs is now aligned with the structure used in the rest of Europe, at least regarding bachelor, master and PhD programs. Many structural changes have occurred with mergers between many universities and university

colleges. Many quality-assurance frameworks and guidelines must be followed on the institutional level, and the government has provided organs that make sure the institutions meet the quality requirements.

In the institutional or meso level, all universities and university colleges are obliged to have quality assurance procedures in place regarding the educational level of their academic staff. To obtain the accreditation as a university, there must be a certain amount of teaching staff with at least a PhD degree. There are requirements regarding the design of the study programs, and the institution must involve students and staff in the development of these programs. Evaluations of the study programs/courses delivered must be conducted by the institutions such as by different types of student surveys.

At the micro level where the teaching occurs, findings from the national student survey (Bakken, Pedersen, & Fretland Øygarden, 2018) state that students are happy with the quality of the study program they attend, where the national average is 4.1 on a scale where 5 represents the best score. However, they are not happy with the amount and quality of feedback from the teachers.

Teachers state they use student-active teaching and learning strategies according to the national teacher survey (Lid et al., 2018). Yet there are few traces in the study program descriptions regarding the type of learning activities used. The general impression is that the majority of teaching is delivered in lecture form. There is a mismatch between what is stated and what is delivered if the definition of student-active teaching and learning strategies exclude different types of lectures. Lectures of high quality can create engagement in the student and some dialogue, but is this the teaching and learning method that the government discusses in “Quality Culture in Higher Education” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016)? When talking to academic staff in my own university, they often refer to themselves as experts of special fields delivering content that provides knowledge, skills and competencies to the students rather than as an educationist, and they often discuss dialogue-based lectures as a type of student-active teaching and learning method. In a dialogue-based lecture, the focus lies on what the teacher does, but according to Biggs (2011), the focus should shift towards what the students do and how they learn. In the report 2015:24 from The Nordic

Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, Damşa et al. (2015) discuss lecture- vs student-centred learning approaches:

Several studies have criticized the traditional lecture format for its passive nature that fails to keep students focused. Active elements in the form of digital sources, interactive components, and questions are suggested as means to tackle this. A theme throughout most of the literature is the importance of facilitating ways in which students can take a more active part in the construction of knowledge in their studies. In our review we identify a range of student-centred approaches and a number of positive outcomes of students' learning associated with problem-based learning, case-based learning, project-based learning and inquiry-based learning.

Amundsen and Haakstad (2017) view it as a problem that the voice of the teachers seems to be less heard than those of political and institutional leaderships and students regarding finding incentives that will develop their teaching; for instance, it is problematic that the ongoing change processes in higher education have led to less time to prepare their teaching and less time to interact with the students. The participants in their study state that teaching has significantly changed in higher education over the past 20 years but this has occurred despite rather than due to the external pressure.

One can thus conclude that there is no magical formula to create or secure quality in higher education and that there is no single factor, body or regulation that can "fix it". People must band together, and it does not seem to be a single path to what is perceived as high-quality teaching as a student. R. Berger (2017) quoted the character Ellis Boyd Redding in the film *The Shawshank Redemption*: "I'm an institutionalized man, now". For people who have spent years in one system and succeeded and prospered in that system, it seems to be challenging to find other ways to deliver teaching beyond one's experience.

3 METHODOLOGY

Almost every time we speak we engage in storytelling, and sharing stories is arguably the most important way we have of communicating with others about who we are and what we believe; about what we are doing and have done; about our hopes and fears; about what we value and what we don't. We make sense of our lives by telling stories about them; and we learn about other people by listening to the stories they tell. Sometimes, under the influence of the culture in which we are immersed, we live our lives in ways that try to create the stories we want to be able to tell about them (Hayes, Edlmann, & Brown, 2019, p. 1).

This thesis is based upon empirical data in the form of narratives from educators at Nord University, which represents the chosen methodology. In this section, the narrative methodology and different choices are explained.

3.1 Approaches to research

When beginning a research project, the researcher must decide how to approach the subject matter through some assumptions about science, as illustrated in Figure 5.

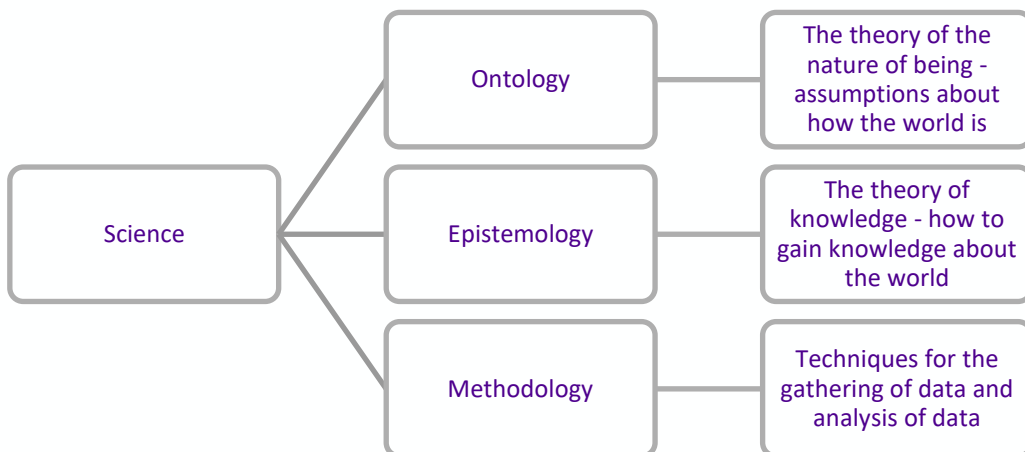


FIGURE 5 Basic assumptions about science. Based upon Gripsrud, Silkoset, and Olsson (2010).

3.1.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

Johannessen, Christoffersen, and Tufte (2010) differentiate between natural science that mainly relates to researching phenomena without language and the ability to understand oneself and surroundings where there are no possibilities to ask or discuss with the objects of study. The researcher is a spectator to the research object. In social science on the other hand, the field of study is the human, and people have opinions and perceptions about themselves and others. This field regards a multitude of opinions which are not stable but constantly changing. The researcher of social science is a part of society and cannot be a mere spectator of what is studied.

One's perspective has consequences for the practical implementation of the research project, for instance regarding the development of the problem formulation, research question(s), choosing cases, whom to interview, the development of interview guide and/or survey and how to conduct the analysis.

In social science, there are three different perspectives that one often utilises: realism, phenomenology and constructivism. Realism is based on the assumption that reality exists in a particular and unambiguous form which is "out there" regardless of our recognition. One wants to describe phenomena as precisely, unambiguously and neutrally as possible. Phenomenology studies the subjective actions and opinions of different actors of these actions. Here, the purpose of the researcher is not to identify and explain causality but to interpret, understand and typify subjective meanings. In a constructivist perspective where the assumption is that reality is constructed through social processes, the purpose of research is to capture the complexity that characterises how the phenomenon comes about and describe the complexity and ambiguity of as many facets as possible (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2010).

Constructivism regards a collective term used to describe different perspectives which are all based on the assumption that our realisation of the world in some form/sense represents constructions of reality. In the constructivist perspective, reality is a construct and does not, as in realism, describe an objective size that exists independently of the social aspect of life (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2010).

Collin (2003) states that constructivism claims that what appears to be obvious, natural or necessary tend to be taken for granted but are actually constructions that could have always appeared different. In other words, phenomena are contiguous and are historical or socially conditioned. From this perspective, the reality is out there but is not detached from people's understanding of it; it exists beyond a notion in people's heads. Constructivists such as P. L. Berger and Luckmann (1967) emphasise that the world is collectively constructed and that collective objects such as language, discourses and objective institutional structures are significant and constitute the context to which the individual refers. There is hence generally a strong focus on language and how language creates reality in constructivist analyses. My project is based in constructivism. When creating a story, the storyteller creates his/her reality, hence the voices of the educators and their story is their reality and my objective in this project.

One central epistemological question asks, are empirical data the sole basis for research, or can knowledge be gained from thoughts and reflections without empirical data? According to the former view, knowledge must be based upon what one can observe and anything else regards speculation. The other view states that there might be other forces and structures behind social life that cannot be observed, but can still be subject to research, for example by asking for the informants thoughts and reflection in written form.

Another central epistemological concept involves words such as "truth" and "objectivity" as well as how to secure knowledge and how to identify "true" knowledge. A claim can be defined as true if it corresponds to reality, is logically concise, is useful or fruitful or is based on agreement between the persons to whom it relates. In addition, others will argue that truth is linked to power and that some people's interests always lie behind established truths in society. What all seem to agree upon is:

None of us meet the world unconditionally, and our background - both personal and professional - will be one of the process of establishing knowledge. Something can be formulated linguistically, but much is intuitive knowledge that seems to interfere with the research process without us being aware of it. (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 55)

It is hence vital to reflect upon one's perspective and background and clarify whether there are circumstances that might affect the research, for instance one's ontological, epistemological or professional perspective.

As a researcher, I am a part of the social sciences and am not a neutral spectator to the subject studied, studied which is something that is understood in the interpretive tradition of qualitative research (Tjora, 2012). I have spent a significant portion of my life among educators and have been a subject of their pedagogical and didactic choices. I work with educators, make assumptions and have some bias towards educators, hence it is impossible for me to be completely neutral and objective. I am an active part of this project as I am the one interpreting the statements of my informants.

3.1.2 Methodological considerations

Another element that separates different types of social science research regards the chosen methodology or how the researcher collected empirical data and conducted the analysis. In social science, there are mainly three different types of methodology: quantitative, qualitative and a mix of both. Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 14) state, "the word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency".

Thagaard (2013) reflects upon the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods, where qualitative methods seek to delve in-depth and emphasise meaning, while quantitative methods emphasise the extent and number. My project is qualitative, as I want to learn about educators in-depth and hear their voices. Chase (2008, p. 58) states that narrative inquiry regards a "particular type, a subtype, of qualitative inquiry...all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them". The narratives may be oral or written and may have been produced or heard during a fieldwork, an interview or a naturally occurring conversation. "For most people, storytelling is a natural way of recounting experience, a practical solution to a fundamental problem in life, or

creating reasonable order out of experience” (Klenke, 2016, p. 227). Furthermore, Chase (2008, p. 59) divides narratives into three categories:

(a) a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters such as an encounter with a friend, boss, or doctor; (b) an extended story about a significant aspect of one’s life such as schooling, work, marriage, divorce, childbirth, an illness, a trauma, or participation in a war or social movement; or (c) a narrative of one’s entire life, from birth to the present.

There is no single definition for a narrative. As Riessman (2008, p. 5) points out, there are a “range of definitions of narrative, often linked to discipline... but all work with contingent sequences”. At one end of the discourse, one finds social linguistics where the narrative refers to a “discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centred and temporally organized” (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). At the other end in social history and anthropology, the narrative refers to “an entire life story, woven from threads of interviews, observations and documents” (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). In the middle, one finds another working definition of narrative from the tradition of psychology and sociology. “Here, personal narrative encompasses long sections of talk – extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple research interviews or therapeutic conversations” (Riessman, 2008, p. 6). There are also those who distinguish between a narrative and story and claim that a “story” only can be used in Aristoteles’ manner of using the word, while some use the words interchangeably in writing (Riessman, 2008; Sørly & Blix, 2017).

There are different types of narrative empirical data. Depending on the nature of the research project, one might study narrative materials from sources that already exist such as books, blogs and movies. As mentioned above, written texts can also represent a method of gathering narrative empirical data such as literature, diaries, notes or other written material. Sørly and Blix (2017) mention that in recent years, blogs and other multimedia text on the internet have increased, where the authors of the text write about their own life.

Sometimes the researcher needs to produce other types of materials during the research project such as through interviews, observations or by asking participants to write stories, take pictures or make a movie (Sørly & Blix, 2017). The most common method of gathering narrative empirical data is through interviews. How the interview is structured can differ, but the purpose is always to have the participants tell their story. One can interview individuals or groups, and narrative empirical data can also be created via fieldwork and observations. Fieldwork can be lengthy and continuous or can be performed as multiple, repeated visits.

The goal of this thesis is to get to know educators at Nord University better, and I want to achieve this through their stories. These stories did not already exist but had to be produced during my project. The most common method of acquiring data from research participants is through interviews, which I could have conducted but chose not to. I wanted the participants to formulate their stories themselves with as little influence from a researcher as possible. I wanted their words, not mine, since I am aware that I am an active part of this project, hence I asked for their stories delivered as a written text.

I did not want a complete life story from my informants and am only interested in a small part of their life. Chase (2008, pp. 67-68) states that:

...the narrative researchers share the interest in the “hows” and “whats” of storytelling but base their inquiry on incentive interviews about specific aspects of people’s lives rather than on conversations in specific organizational contexts. These researcher are interested in how people communicate meaning through a range of linguistic practices, how their stories are embedded in the interaction between researcher an narrator, how they make sense of personal experience in relation to culturally and historically specific discourses, and how they draw on, resit, and/or transform those discourses as they narrate their selves, experiences, and realities... These researchers produce detailed transcripts...to study linguistic and thematic patterns throughout the narrative.

I am interested in the narrative from the educators at Nord University and their unique voices regarding their reflections upon being an educator.

3.1.3 Data acquisition methods

As previously mentioned, I have chosen the narrative story as my method of data acquisition. These stories, 7 in total, were formulated by educators at Nord University. The invitation to participate in my research project was sent via email to 51 educators at 3 different campuses from the university's address book in Microsoft Outlook. I chose to invite educators at campuses where I knew I had not discussed my project during my first year at Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) to ensure not influencing the participants in any way before they received the invite. To be chosen, they were required to work at different faculties and have different levels of degrees. I chose these criteria in order to prevent receiving answers from only one type of culture, level of education or discipline.

In the invitation, I introduced myself and my project to the possible participants and explained what I wanted from them. They were asked to formulate a text about 3-4 pages long in which they told their story, which involved reflecting on and writing their thoughts about being a teacher in higher education based upon the goal of my project listed in the invitation. I mentioned that the text I wanted would contain their thoughts and opinions on the subject matter. After a conversation with one of the educators that received the invite, I sent another email to all the educators who received the first invite to point out in more detail that I wanted an informal text with no formal demands regarding how they wrote their story.

The responses were as follows:

TABLE 1 Response to the invite to participate to research project

Total invites	No response	Refusing	Accepting	Delivered stories
51	27	13	11	7

The 11 educators that initially answered yes to the invite were promptly sent a consent form allowing me to use their story in my research. Out of the 11 that responded yes, I received 7 stories. The stories varied in length from around 500 to 2000 words, with most around 1200-1400 words.

The stories were written in Norwegian. Although my thesis is written in English, I chose to request a story in Norwegian since the educators are all native Norwegian speakers. This decision was made firstly because I believe asking the informants to write in a second language instead of their mother tongue could make it more challenging to formulate a well-written text and secondly to avoid misunderstandings due to the language barrier.

3.1.4 Analysis methods

One of the most common methods of analysing narrative empirical data is called thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008), which Braun and Clarke (2006) define as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. There is no single way of conducting thematic analysis according to Sørly and Blix (2017), but the content is the focus. “What” is said rather than “how”, “to whom” or for what purpose. In my analysis, I want to focus on a few particular themes within the data that are related to my research question. Braun and Clarke (2006) call this a theoretical thematic analysis, which is in contrast to what they call inductive thematic analysis:

This form of thematic analysis tends to provide less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data. Additionally, the choice between inductive and theoretical maps onto how and why you are coding the data. You can either code for a quite specific research question (which maps onto the more theoretical approach) or the specific research question can evolve through the coding process (which maps onto the inductive approach). (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84)

My research question “What kind of reflections does the educator at Nord University make regarding his/her own teaching and student-centred teaching, and are there traces of the official policy regarding quality in higher education in their reflections?” consists of three parts:

What kind of reflections does the educator do regarding:

- a) their own teaching,
- b) student-centred teaching and

c) is there trace of the official policy in their stories?

These three parts represent the overall themes or categories that I will try to answer using my dataset regarding the written stories from the educators.

Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the importance of making a decision whether one seeks semantic or latent themes and within which paradigm in epistemology one works. They say that thematic analysis conducted within a constructivist framework seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that enable and create individual opinions.

In my analysis, I utilise Braun and Clarke's six-step-model for performing narrative thematic analysis. This model is also recommended by Sørly and Blix (2017) and provides a "How-to" in six different phases, as shown in Figure 6.

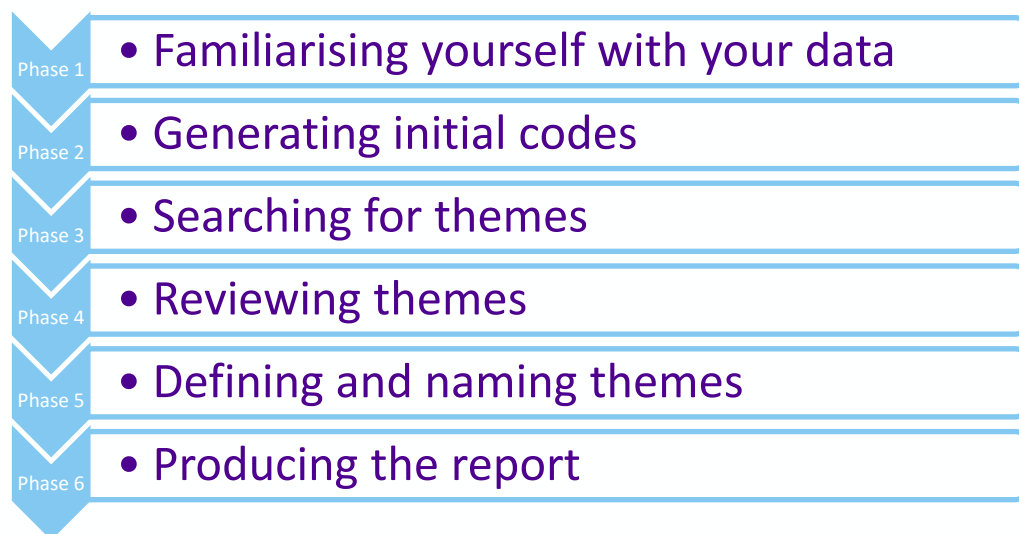


FIGURE 6 Phases of thematic analysis (modified Braun & Clarke, 2006)

The report creates a new text containing the references collected from the informants' stories. The goal of the new text is to elucidate the themes found in the analysis.

I imported all my empirical data to NVivo, which enabled me to generate codes and connect the statements from the informants to the codes, as shown in Image 2 below.

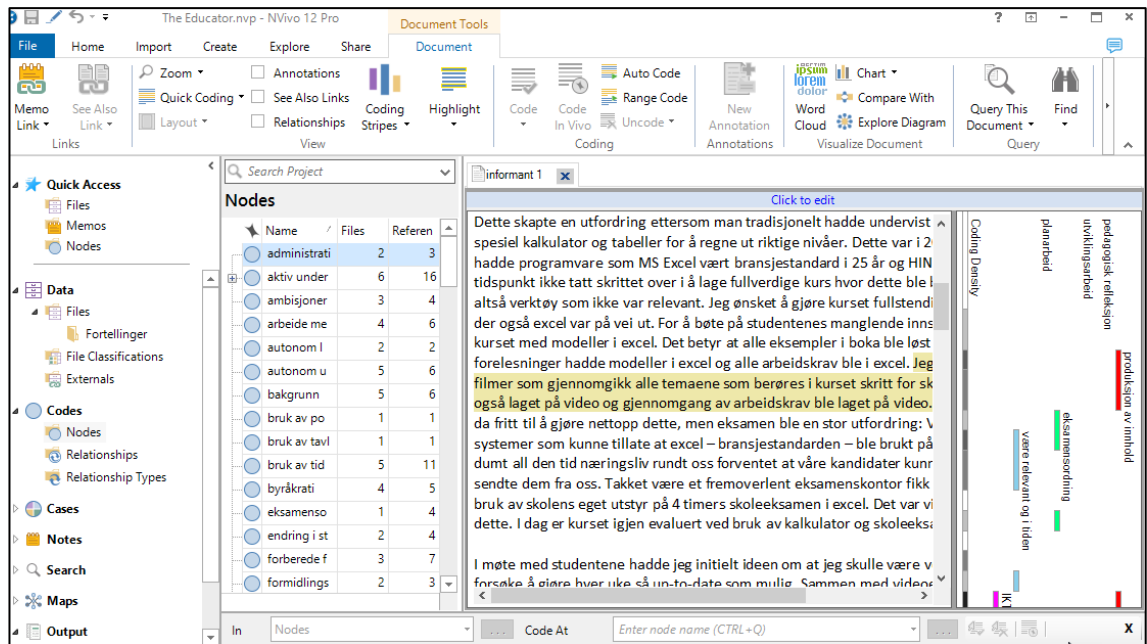


IMAGE 2 Print screen of a text that are coded using NVivo. Highlighted text are one of the coded parts of informant 1's contribution, coded with "produksjon av innhold" (production of content).

In phase 3, I grouped the initial codes into general themes to map patterns that lead to more clear themes later. Image 3 illustrates my initial attempt of searching for more general themes.



IMAGE 3 First attempt of generalizing in themes – what promotes/ inhibitor quality

Table 2 Final themes based upon used codes in NVivo.

Pedagogisk ståsted	Pedagogy	Being an educator
Praksis nær		
Profesjonsutdanning		
Pedagogisk refleksjon		
Autonom underviser		
Underviserrollen		
Forberede for yrkeslivet		
Prioritert fokus i det daglige		
Aktiv undervisning		
Samhold i kollegiet	Motivation	
Glede		
Yrkes stolthet		
Gjøre andre bra		
Oppeves som motiverende eller inspirerende		
Administrative oppgaver	Experienced as demanding	
Arbeide med å motivere studenter		
Være tilgjengelig for studentene		
Miljøbygging		
Forskning		
Passiv undervisning		
Endring i studentmassen		
Studentenes evne til sjølstendig og kritisk tenkning		
Student fokus		
Syn på studentene		
Ambisjoner som underviser		Development work
Utviklingsarbeid		
Være relevant og i tiden	Active learners	
Autonom lærende		
Tilpasset undervisning		
Omvendt undervisning		
Muligheter i det fysiske rommet		
Refleksjon av resultat av valgt undervisning-metode		
Standardisering av undervisning		
Krav om effektivisering		
Planarbeid		
Fragmentering		
Eksamen (siste)	Feelings	
Føle seg verdsatt		
Tillit		
Medbestemmelse		
Tidstyver	Time	
Byråkrati		
Bruk av tid		
Manglende eller dårlige rutiner		
Kvalitet på egen undervisning		
Ledelse	About the management	

I ended up with 4 main themes:

1. Being an educator
2. About the students
3. Development work
4. Leadership and the effect of wanted policy

I returned to NVivo and grouped the references into nodes as shown in column 2 of Table 2. Each node was printed out and I read them again to acquire a new

impression of the educators' view of the themes, which led to "Café Conversation" presented in Chapter 4.2.

3.3 Ethical considerations

One should always consider the ethical implications when conducting research. Johannessen et al. (2010) stress the importance of the informant's right to self-determination and autonomy, the researcher's duty to respect the informant's privacy and the researcher's responsibility to avoid harm.

The informant's right to self-determination and autonomy implies that the people asked to participate or who are current or previous participants in a research project should be able to decide about their participation. The person concerned must provide explicit and voluntary consent to the participation and be made aware that they can withdraw their participation at any time without consequences. When I extended the invite to participate to my project, I informed that I would send a consent form to those who wanted to participate. I did so and every participant received a consent form listing the information above. I used a standard consent-form template created by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

Regarding the researcher's duty to respect informants' privacy, I made it clear to the informants that they should not provide any information in their stories that made it possible to identify them. I have also removed metadata connected to the delivered files.

The researcher's responsibility to avoid harm is less relevant in my project but more related to projects where the researcher for instance might ask difficult questions during interviews that can lead to emotional difficulties for the participants.

3.4 Reflections on the quality of the project

When assessing the quality of a qualitative research project, words such as reliability, credibility, transferability and verifiability are used. Noble and Smith (2015) present a different set of terminology when conducting qualitative research, as presented in Table 3, which I have chosen to utilise when assessing my project.

Table 3 Terminology and criteria used to evaluate the credibility of research findings (Noble & Smith, 2015, pp. 34-34).

Terms used in quantitative research that might be applied to qualitative research	Alternative terminology used to establish credibility of quantitative research
Validity - The precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data.	Truth value - Recognises that multiple realities exist; the researchers' outline personal experiences and viewpoints that may have resulted in methodological bias; clearly and accurately presents participants' perspectives.
Reliability - The consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings.	Consistency - Relates to the 'trustworthiness' by which the methods have been undertaken and is dependent on the researcher maintaining a 'decision-trail'; that is, the researcher's decisions are clear and transparent. Ultimately an independent researcher should be able to arrive at similar or comparable findings. Neutrality (or confirmability) - Achieved when truth value, consistency and applicability have been addressed. Centres on acknowledging the complexity of prolonged engagement with participants and that the methods undertaken and findings are intrinsically linked to the researchers' philosophical position, experiences and perspectives. These should be accounted for and differentiated from participants' accounts.
Generalisability - The transferability of the findings to other settings and applicability in other contexts.	Applicability - Consideration is given to whether findings can be applied to other contexts, settings or groups.

When attempting to evaluate the truth value of a project, Tjora (2012) says that within all types of social research, the researcher will have some dedication to

the topic being researched. According to the interpretive tradition on which qualitative research is based, complete neutrality cannot exist. It is thus important to be open about this and prepared to adjust one's understanding along the way.

I am a teacher and hold opinions regarding what is high-quality teaching, and I believe to a large extent that university educators are not so interested in teaching. This is not based on research reports about educators in higher education but more on my own experience as a student, a co-worker of educators and on what has been said and written about educators in official documents such as whitepapers from the government. One reason I chose this particular project was that I felt my colleagues and I made many assumptions regarding the identity and needs of educators. I greatly considered my own biases before beginning the analysis and have had to adjust my understanding of the subject matter and the possible outcome of my project.

I am not able to say that my findings represent the truth for all educators at Nord University, however they reflect the truth for those who chose to answer my invite to participate in my research project and help me answer the question I sought to answer. I believe my choice of methods is both clear and transparent and that another researcher should arrive with similar findings when using the same methods. Regarding trustworthiness, I believe my chosen methodology allows for the voices of my informants to be clear without my interference as a researcher, thereby preventing my biases from affecting the informants and their stories.

Considering the applicability of my findings, I believe that although I have only researched a small project with few participants/informants, what I present might also be useful for other universities when trying to facilitate educators in their quest for quality teaching. I do not believe that Nord University and their educators are unique.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

In the following section I present my finding from the collected empirical data, which regards the stories from educators working at Nord University.

4.1 How to present central findings?

As previously stated in Section 3.4, I wanted to elucidate the themes found in my analysis and wanted the educators' voices to be clear in my thesis, and my first supervisor, Pirjo Männynsalo, Principal Lecturer at TAMK, gave me the idea of creating a new story using my informants' words. I was also inspired by the work of Stenhouse (2014), who created poems to present the voices of informants. By creating a new story based upon their own words, their voices will be heard, and I find that the initial impression I received when reading their stories the first time became even stronger in the new text.

I chose to create a scene in a play to allow the informants' voices to come through using the references I had previously thematised using the codes. The references used in the scene stood out as central findings in those themes. The dialogue in the play is comprised of those references, except the dialogue of the character "Oddlaug". I have added a few words to the references to create a dialogue that feels natural, and the words added by me are placed in italic.

After choosing the references, I returned to NVivo and renamed the informants' texts and gave them names based upon popular names in Norway in 2019 which have no resemblance with my informants' real names. The purpose was to connect the different chosen references to a name and then make that person's voice identifiable throughout the scene in the play.

The scene was created using the original language of the references (Norwegian) and translated to English by me.

4.2 Café conversations – a scene from Nord University

Characters

f=female/m=male

Academic staff: Emma (f)
 Nora (f)
 Olivia (f)
 Lukas (m)
 Henrik (m)
 Emil (m)
 Oskar (m)

Non-academic staff: Oddlaug (f)

SCENE – We are in a café with different types of seating possibilities made out of different chairs and tables at one of the campuses at Nord University. This campus was previously a part of the University College of Nord-Trøndelag (HiNT). Around a table, eight people are sitting having a conversation. All are drinking coffee and the mood is informal and pleasant. The academic staff is talking about what motivates them.

Lukas: I have always liked to “explain” things to others and have had the great pleasure of helping others gain a better understanding of something for their own part.

Nora: I feel that I am in a privileged position where I get the opportunity to follow students on their professional education programs. I like the teaching setting and being in dialogue with the students.

Emma: An interaction between me as a teacher and the *students* is crucial. I get motivated when the students make an effort and I notice their commitment. I have always enjoyed teaching and call myself a teacher with pride. It's a great profession! When I started teaching in college, that's what I wanted to do - teach. I like to try new things. Students who put forth a lot of effort get a lot of support from me. I don't count many hours when I mentor students who are active. I go

far for those who want to, who get started. If they have a good idea and an exciting practical approach, they get a lot of help. Maybe a little too much, sometimes in terms of time spent - don't say anything to the unions!

The others around the table chuckle.

Emil: I love knowledge and like to share it with others. I like discussions with students and am in a kind of flow. It's a "joyful" situation for me. Teaching is still fun. The students work hard and are pleasant to be with.

Oddlaug: What do you think about different forms of teaching. Do you mostly hold lectures or...?

Henrik: It is probably a rather strong tradition in the world of university that the teacher gives lectures and the students are quite passive listeners. In my opinion, this is not a very suitable way of teaching. I try to make teaching as practically focused as possible to increase student activation, both physically and mentally. Besides, I believe that most people, both old and young, learn better when doing things than just hearing or reading about it.

Lukas: *Exactly*, the classic way of teaching in my field, i.e. lectures, is less creative and does not provide students with sufficient competence to meet the requirements they will face. *I have* put great emphasis on developing better and more interactive learning styles. As a whole, I have spent time on the case methodology. *I want to* turn upside down all the courses I now take part in and develop. I put the problem first and then introduce theory and analysis methodology that is relevant to the problem. That is, I do not start with theory and work outwards but work in the opposite direction. My time with the students is entirely spent on solving actual problems that businesses and organizations are facing or have been facing.

Several nods agreeing with Lukas and the coffee is sent around.

Nora: I am concerned about a socio-cultural learning environment and how to facilitate different ways and methods of learning, so that is how I want to put my mark on teaching. I want to make teaching based on the syllabus that I have found to be suitable for this subject. I use a lot of group work and exercises. Varied teaching and high professional quality where the students get the opportunity to take part in their own educational process—I see that as something important.

Olivia: *I myself am* no stranger to a good lecture. It can lift both teacher and student. The good story with good examples creates structure in a theme, which points to the central elements of the topic. With a good presentation, illustrations, a video and dialogue in the auditorium to break it up a bit, make it relevant. Planning and preparing such a lecture is a good academic exercise for me.

Emil: *Neither do I*, I think ... that there is nothing inferior about my teaching, in its conventionality and that my teaching is up to standard. Nevertheless, I'm sure that my teaching could have been better if I had taken good courses on teaching, especially if it allowed for pedagogical development in my subjects.

Olivia: *At the same time*, I enjoy using non-traditional learning arenas. The lecture hall is not my thing - it is too rigid. We may very well "ride the bus"¹ at the start of the session, but it must be possible to easily and quickly organize the students into groups, some physical acting out or a speed dating, for example - very fun way of working, by the way. Or we must go outside. But it has to be professional - the arena you are moving into must be perceived as relevant. I realize that I teach at a university. But this is rarely my point of view. The formal requirements will eventually get attention, but first we need to be creative - get started - do. Use inductive methods. Start work in unploughed

¹ Norwegian expression for sitting in a way that all face front, like you do when riding a bus.

fields. Have the students find out on their own. Let them plan how they will solve the problem, analyse the theories, use the sources, present the results ...

Oddlaug: You all seem to be focused on creating activity among the students, but what do you really think about the students nowadays?

Emma: I find that students today want more "bottle refilling" through lectures rather than group or plenary reflection, and I feel that students are less critical and independent than before. Many students learn that it is safest to refer to knowledge and many become uncertain about what we mean by independence and critical thinking.

Lukas: *I have experienced* that many did not bother and that I spent too much time motivating them.

Emma: *At the same time* students are more hardworking and keen to perform well. I probably give most to those students who make an effort themselves, and I find it challenging to "drag" students through the subject if they themselves are not willing to delve into it. The students complain about grades without really being able to reflect on their own effort.

Oskar: Students are not a uniform group, they require different pedagogy and different approaches.

The other academic staff mutters consensually.

Oddlaug: That's probably true. Can you elaborate on that a little?

Oskar pulls out a piece of paper and starts to write whilst talking out loud.

Oskar: We have the young, straight out of upper secondary school:

1. Seemingly ambitious, but little experience.
2. "Found nothing else" – students.
3. The academically strong ones.

Then we have those who are a bit older and studying for the first time:

4. Street smart – practice trumps theory.
5. Don't really have anything in higher education to do, but need to be retrained.
6. Those who always have had a desire to study and finally have the time to do so.

Then we have those coming in round 2:

7. The fussy, everything must be explained to them in detail, independent.
8. The reflective and sharing students.
9. "I know better than you" students.

Laughs around the table. Oskar looks at the piece of paper and continues.

Oskar: All of these *students* may have other things that seem to be more important than the subject taught. I must unfortunately admit that especially No. 7 can be tiring. 6, 8, 1 and 3 are the most motivating to relate to. 4 and 9 can also be a challenge until at some point when they realize that the purpose of higher education is to learn something new, not confirm their own prejudices - irony in relation to myself is fully intentional. 2 and 5 are the ones you have to adapt to in order to motivate, must in a way try to get them interested and develop what they have as abilities.

Oddlaug: In other words, not exactly a homogeneous group. (*Laughing.*)

Lukas: I *initially* had the idea of being very accessible to the students. I spent way too much energy on being available to them. And it simply became too much for me to deal with the students and all of their challenges and problems.

Oddlaug: I see. Are there other things that you perceive as demanding?

- Nora:* At times, I think administrative tasks take up too much space and take time away from professional focus. I also find that systems that are implemented to simplify such processes often work the opposite way. You need to know a certain computer program in order to perform various registrations, computer programs that are constantly changing and evolving and therefore difficult to keep up with.
- Emil:* Agree, the digital framework around the courses takes too much time. It consists of digital learning systems such as Canvas, a separate exam system, Inspera, and a third system where results from assignments and exams delivered in Canvas and Inspera are to be reported (that's what the Professional web is about, isn't it?). Another system for submitting curriculum literature, Leganto, systems for scheduling subjects (or what EpN was now), etc. I am getting used to fulfilling requirements regarding adding information into those systems at the very end or a little afterwards, because then it has to be done and then I spend the least amount of time doing it.
- Henrik:* Nord University is constantly criticized for doing too little research. In my section there is relatively much research going on, and I myself have been writing 2 articles in the 3 years I have been employed here. Much of the time I've spent on this research, I could have used for professional updating. There is little of the theory in my research that can be used in my teaching. The focus on research and research points harms the quality of teaching.
- Olivia:* I do not have the patience to become a good researcher but have faith that I do a good job teaching. I am accused of having my heart - identity?- in the vocational education and am not paying the university enough attention. The students love it - the employer is a bit more reserved ... and I do not want to research but rather teach.

- Oddlaug:* I get the impression that you feel a lot of time goes to both administrative tasks and research. Has this changed since we became a university?
- Emma:* The system has... become more bureaucratic and focused on the individual rights of the students. The negative is that everything bureaucratic seems demotivating and is experienced as a waste of time and work.
- Emil:* I don't have exact numbers, but I think the time resource I have available for a subject is now reduced by between a third and fifty percent since I started teaching at college. This was a process that started whilst we were HiNT and continues at NORD. In some subjects I now have, almost half of the time available for the subject is earmarked censorship. It is obvious to me that it reduces the quality of my teaching and my teaching program.
- Lukas:* *For example*, the rigidity of the course development at the university and the forms of examination. There is too long lead time between when something must be ready until it can be delivered. Much is progressing so fast that we should be able to make adjustments to evaluations and content faster than today, when things need to be ready several years before it can be implemented. It prevents innovation and innovation.
- Nora:* New guidelines for coordinating programs at different campuses nevertheless I feel are a bit of a hindrance to the practice of my profession, my contribution somehow. The idea is that students on different campuses should have the same offer and the same syllabus, but that deprives me of the opportunity to choose the syllabus and tailor teaching to the place, the student group and my own competence (as well as the place's uniqueness and history). This becomes too streamlined and boring for someone who is passionate about their subject, who will discuss, search for, throw out new research articles

and have a lively and vibrant education. Teaching from a set curriculum can in theory be done by a computer or possibly the students themselves.

Emma: It has become more standardization and less room for personal discretion and professional autonomy.

Oskar: I have had on average more than one new course a year, much because the management is unable to focus and does not use the resources in a sensible way. This results in waste of time because new courses are being developed but not run. To teach when another person is the subject manager ends up being a lot about planning, so that the students get the same as they do at the other campuses, and to ensure the students are in sync when it comes to the exam. It has become so now with regards to the many different campuses that there is a person who is responsible for the subject, and at the other campuses you as a teacher have to follow a given plan. It depends very much on how the subject manager works, it can ruin the progress of planning if you do not receive an answer by email within a reasonable time.

Emil: Rigid management of educational programs and utter lack of interest in a student group of adult, working people may need different teaching and facilitation than 19-year-old campus students threaten the very basis of the study / *teach*.

Oddlaug: What about the management? Do they facilitate you as educators?

Oskar: To the extent that we currently have leadership at Nord, it is more of a concern than a benefit, mostly because they are unable to see the entirety of what they do. It is demotivating and annoying that courses with good student evaluations are discontinued after 1 or 2 years because one has a new dean, study program manager or god knows what they think, who has the solution to everything - even though the experience is very limited - and should change the composition of a

study. In practice, it is the subjects they like that are prioritized as "important". This often means that there is a lot of unused teaching capacity or people have to teach subjects they are not interested in.

Emil: No one has asked me what I wanted, and I'm not too good at fighting for what I think is good, or fighting against what I think is bad. I am more the type that accepts the given framework conditions. The signals that teaching and students are important are particularly weak from my leadership. I like freedom, but I also like interest in what I do.

Henrik: For it is research production that is awarded with new titles and increases in salaries. There should have been a greater focus on good teaching by management. But this is difficult to measure in the same way that research is measured in publishing points.

Emil: My dean said on one occasion that teaching is something we prepare for the night before. It may have been said with a smile, but I still feel that is the reality of my situation today, and for me it legitimizes a last-minute attitude to teaching. That's the way it should be, because we have more important things to do.

Nora: I experience little support and follow-up from management, I feel that we as employees are often not seen and heard. I mean, a little recognition for the job you do could have been nice, not the least interest. I also find that there is great difference in treatment and that some subjects, positions and tasks are lifted more than others. I am proud of my job and would appreciate if the "job" had shown that it was proud of me too.

Oddlaug: Well, at least I really appreciated talking to you. *(Smiling)* I must go now. We'll talk more later. Enjoy the rest of your coffee!

Oddlaug gets up and leaves. The others stay seated and continue the conversation mumbling. The light dims. Scene ends.

4.3 Summary of central findings

I have summarised my central findings of the thematic narrative analysis in Figure 7. The findings are divided into four themes: being an educator, about the students, development work and leadership and effect of wanted policy.



FIGURE 7 Central findings of the thematic narrative analysis.

In the following section I display the findings and four themes in Figure 7.

4.3.1 Being an educator

All of my informants report that they enjoy teaching, are proud of being a teacher/educator and prefer teaching over research. Most of my informants report that they use some sort of student-centred teaching where the students form an active part in their learning. They say that lecturing is not their favourite method of teaching, but if performed well it might provide a valuable contribution to the students' learning. The informants want their teaching to be close to the working life that waits ahead of students to prepare them. They report that performing administrative tasks are demotivating and takes time away from teaching. The use of ICT-systems that are reportedly designed or implemented to help teachers become more efficient often do the opposite in reality.

4.3.2 About the students

The student body has changed and become more heterogeneous, which is perceived as more demanding by the informants, who prefer students that are active and take ownership of their own learning. The informants perceive unmotivated students and their problems not related to the course as demanding.

4.3.3 Development work

The educators say they want to develop their own teaching further but report that systems act as a hindrance or are lacking, thus impeding them in their development work. They also report that the coordination and streamlining of courses across campuses prevent creativity and autonomy.

4.3.4 Leadership and effect of wanted policy

Research is expressed by the leadership as being more important than teaching. The educators report that there is a perceived lack of support from management, a lack of trust towards the management and that they are not being heard in matters of importance. There seems to be a lack of direction when developing study programs, as observed by the educators, as well as an us-them relationship between educators and management.

5 DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPACT

Section 5 includes discussion of my findings and outlines their potential practical impacts.

5.1 The danger of assumptions

“Assumption noun (belief) An assumption is something that you accept as true without question or proof” (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

5.1.1 Mismatch in findings in national surveys

The purpose of the white paper “Culture for Quality” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016) is to enhance the quality of the provided teaching and study programs in higher education. The year before this white paper was published, the yearly survey among students in higher education reported that 90% of the teaching was in lecture form, as shown in Figure 7.

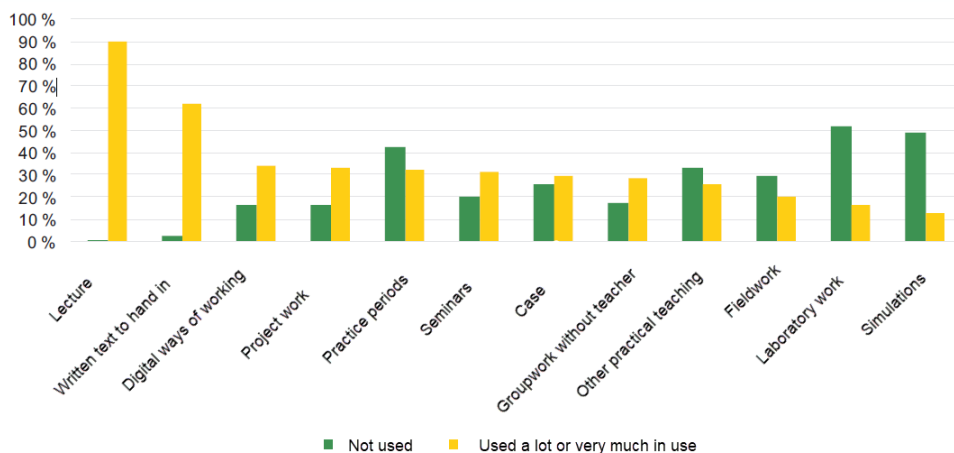


FIGURE 8 Proportion of students who report that the form of instruction is used. Based upon numbers from the student survey from 2015 as shown in Quality Culture in Higher Education. Meld. St. 16 (2016-17)(Ministry of Education and Research, 2016)

According to the latest student survey published in 2018, 19% of students disagree with the claim that the teaching is organised in a way that the students must participate actively, as shown in Figure 9.

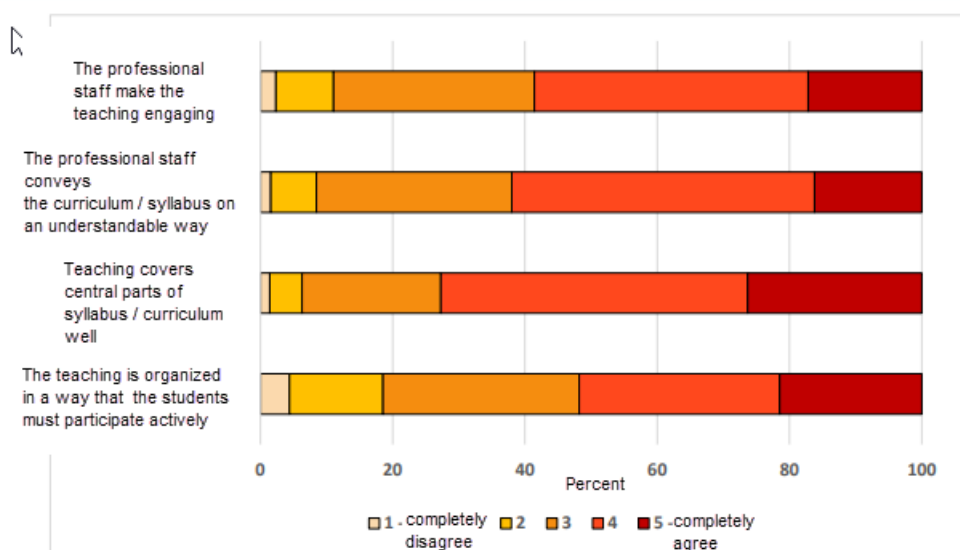


FIGURE 9 Response distribution to teaching questions. Percent. Modified from Studentbarometeret 2018 (Bakken, Pedersen, Fretland Øygarden, & Stabel Wiggen, 2019).

In the teacher survey conducted in 2017, the teachers report that to a large extent they use a varied and student-active methodology (Lid et al., 2018). They unfortunately do not specify the type of instruction provided, so one cannot say whether the teaching is solely a form of dialogue-based lecture or more “true” student-centred teaching. Based on previous experience, I found that educators do not always know the difference between teacher-centred teaching and student-centred teaching (Lindgaard, 2019). This might also be the case when students are asked whether the teaching is organised in a manner that makes them actively participate. What is their definition of being active? Is it to answer questions from the lecturer or does it mean that they are presented with a case where they need to actively make choices and seek knowledge together with their peers? In the teacher survey, I also find that the questions present a sort of truism when the educators are asked to what extent they agree with this claim: “I use teaching and working methods that stimulate students to participate actively in

discussion” (Lid et al., 2018, p. 16). The lack of specification of methodology might lead to false conclusions based upon assumptions rather than facts.

5.1.2 Assumptions made about the educator

One can however also question the assumptions made in the white paper “Culture for Quality” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016). Amundsen and Haakstad (2018) problematise the expressed views in the white paper regarding how the educator is perceived in Norway today. The white paper express a concern that teaching lingers “in the shadow of research” and that the status needs to be lifted. Amundsen and Haakstad (2018) point to four assumptions about the teacher that might be myths that need to be contradicted. The four assumptions are:

- The anti-reform teacher: Efforts to modernise higher education through structural reforms are often seen to threaten academic freedom and the autonomy of the discipline communities.
- The unwilling teacher: Research, not teaching, defines status, promotion and career. You are ‘allowed’ time and resources to do research; you are ‘obliged’ to teach. Consequently, teaching lives in the shadow of research and real engagement in teaching is lacking.
- The conservative teacher: Discipline knowledge is what matters. Teaching follows ‘naturally’ from this well of knowledge. Therefore, traditional methods based on knowledge transfer still dominate, while didactic awareness is less developed.
- The lonely teacher: A higher education teacher is a lonely king in his own teaching realm. The assumption is that there is little cooperation with other teachers and little insight from the outside into the teaching process. Assessment of teaching quality mainly happens by anecdote and reputation.

(Amundsen & Haakstad, 2018, pp. 2-3)

Amundsen and Haakstad (2018) could not find teachers who mirror these assumptions when conducting their interviews of 33 experienced academic teachers, nor could I among my informants, who were all engaged educators who seem to love to teach.

The equivalent to the anti-reform teacher I could not find. I found teachers who reported that they constantly changed or would like to change their teaching.

They reported the use of student-centred teaching where they made the student the active part in the learning process. My informants had a clear vision of the student body as a heterogeneous mass, hence they used different types of methodology to accommodate the “Susan” and “Robert” they faced in class.

The equivalent to the unwilling teacher I could not find. Among my informants, it was rather the opposite in that research lives in the shadow of teaching. Several reported that they would rather spend time on developing their own teaching and teach actively than conduct research.

The equivalent to the conservative teacher was not the dominant type among my informants. Only one of my informants reported that s/he used the traditional lecture as the main form of delivery, and even that person wanted to learn more about how to change his/her method of teaching.

The equivalent to the lonely teacher also had little presence among my informants. Several wrote about developing their teaching/study program with others and mentioned their “good” colleagues.

When beginning this project, I held some assumptions or prejudices regarding the educator. For instance, I assumed that I would find educators who would talk about giving traditional lectures based upon the belief that “I” as an educator must teach the students instead of the students learning; or I assumed I would find some proof of educators discussing student-centred teaching whilst they were actually mentioning a form of lecture. I am an educator myself, have studied at what is now Nord University and have been working as a colleague of educators at Nord University for the past three years. I have never experienced any form of teaching other than the traditional lecture and the odd groupwork assignment, but apparently I might need to change my assumptions.

With that said, I still believe that there can be further development of the teaching delivered at Nord University even though I could not find the “typical” lecturer among my informants. According to the findings in the student survey shown in Figure 8, there is room for improvements regarding allowing students to actively

participate during class. In a study² where participants of a course in higher education pedagogy were asked to reflect upon their own teaching, they found that the main form of instruction was the traditional lecture (Sekkingstad & Fossøy, 2018). All the informants in the research of Amundsen and Haakstad (2018) had taught for more than 15 years in higher education. I find it naive to believe that there are almost no teachers at Nord University who would mostly deliver lectures. I can only speculate about why I did not find any of those “typical” lectures, but it might concern the fact that the data acquisition method was more demanding for respondents or that the “typical” lecturer does not care enough about the project’s subject to expend the necessary effort.

5.1.3 Development work, incentives and assumptions

One of my main findings is that the educators want to develop their own teaching further but there are obstacles in their quest to do so. The main obstacle seems to be time rather than unwillingness to change or develop. Jakobsen and Waldenstrøm (2017) state that it is time consuming for educators to change their teaching from traditional lecture-based to student-centred, even though they spend less time on direct knowledge transfer in the form of a lecture. The participants expressed an experienced shift of time use from giving a lecture to preparing for student activity. They find it resource demanding to compose and evaluate problems and cases to be addressed by the students in class. It also requires time to guide the students and use more formative evaluations of student work.

Regarding the white paper “Culture for Quality”, there are few incentives that give the educator time to further develop their teaching. Due to the assumptions that research is more important or valuable than teaching, the Ministry of Education and Research decided to implement a reward system for excellent teachers. To be considered as a qualified teacher, the teacher must prove that s/he has a clear focus on the students’ learning in all their teaching activities and provides a scientific approach to the work of planning, implementing, assessing and modifying

² There were 43 participants in this study. 15 participants had worked from 0-5 years in higher education, 28 participants for more than 5 years.

their teaching practice to support the students' learning in the best possible manner (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2016, pp. 77-78).

Underlying the system of educational merit is the view that a teacher's activities are part of an organisation as well as an individual effort. Being appointed as a merited teacher thus represents an acknowledgment of both the individual's contribution and the contributions s/he has made to the organisation. Hence a merited teacher can ask for a raise in his/her pay and the faculty or institute will also be rewarded a onetime payment. When browsing through the webpages regarding two universities (NTNU, 2019; UiT, 2019) that have conducted pilots on the reward system, the money rewarded to the faculty/institute is earmarked to pay for allowing the merited teacher to further develop, though it was not clearly stated how. It is also expected that the merited teacher shares his or her experiences with others in various ways. These two pilots will be evaluated in late 2019, and it will be interesting to observe whether the system has enabled raising the status of teaching or whether the teachers report the reward system as being just a desktop exercises that would demand time from the educators.

The differences in external reward systems can be illustrated by the following example: In terms of research, the Norwegian Research Council's research and development revenue from the state in 2014 was NOK 7.8 billion. In comparison, the University of Norway (UHR) managed one of the few state aid schemes for the development of higher-education teaching with a total budget of about NOK 30 million (Grepperud et al., 2016). The conclusions from the numbers are rather unambiguous and merely reinforce the assumption about research receiving greater status than teaching.

5.1.4 “It's too difficult to change”

Another obstacle that my informants reported regarded the perceived rigidity and dilatoriness in the workflow in order to effect a change. Many of my informants want to make the study program and teaching have a design that reflects both the skills needed for working life and the need to accommodate the increasingly heterogenous student body. The performance of the students' assessment

should also reflect this, for which a summative assessment in the form of a written exam where no aid is allowed is probably not the best approach. There must be an academic trinity (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Raaheim, 2019) with an alignment between teaching, assessment and learning outcomes, as shown in Figure 10. The arrows in the figure indicate what is most important for the students' learning, which is both learning strategy and learning outcomes. As Raaheim (2019) states, the students learn from teaching but primarily from being engaged in activity.

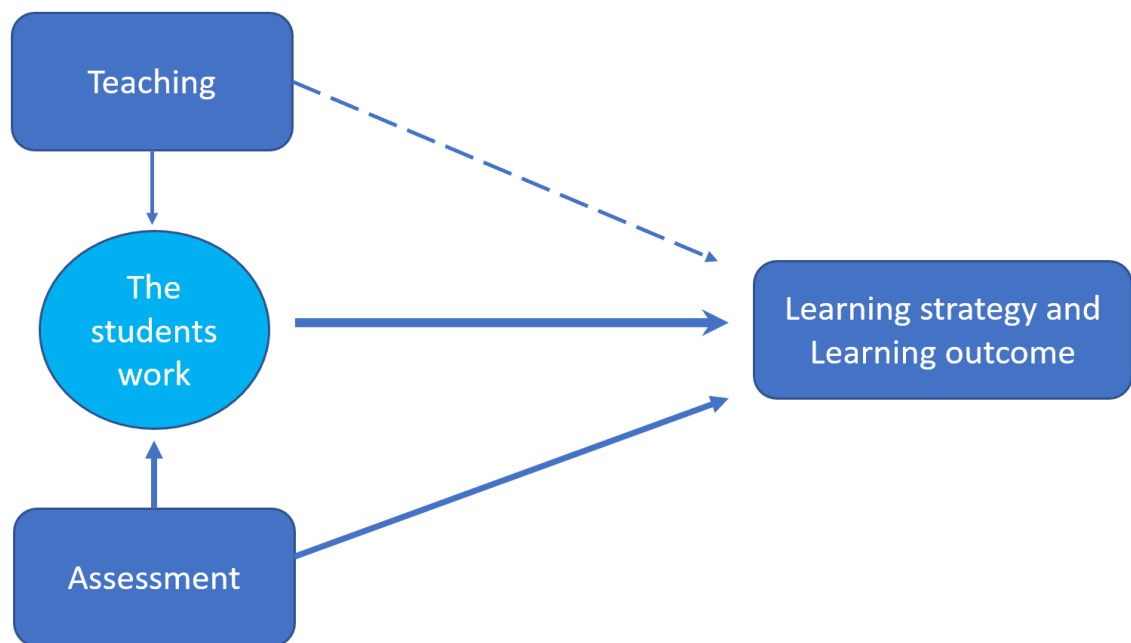


FIGURE 10 Teaching, learning and assessment - an academic trinity. Modified from Raaheim(2019)

The type of chosen assessment will impact the students' expectations and work. If the course is designed in a way that the students receive an ongoing type of formative assessment based on continuous work throughout the course, it will have a different impact on the students' work and activity compared to a written summative exam at the end of the course.

There is an assumption that it is challenging to change anything towards what kind of assessment or teaching strategy to use. It is true that making a change to an ongoing study program regards a lengthy process that cannot be applied to a program that is running; for example, one is not allowed to remove one course

and switch it with another since the study program is regarded as a contract between the university and student. Based on my informants' words, my impression is not to change the whole study program but more about changing for example how one performs assessments. It might be that the educators do not even try, since there seems to be an assumption that to change anything is almost undoable.

5.2 One reform kills the other ...?

The government has initiated several measures to enhance the quality of higher education in Norway. After this project, it struck me that it seems like one reform kills the other. The intentions in "Culture for Quality" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016) are largely undermined by the consequences of "Concentration for Quality" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015), leaving the educator under cross pressure.

5.2.1 Efficient for whom?

There seem to be several obvious consequences for the educator due to the merger between old HiNT and the University of Nordland, and most are related to the use of time. My informants state that time is lacking when they want to develop as educators. As part of the reforms, how the university is funded has changed. Today the grants are divided into three types: one general grant, one based upon the number of students pushed through the system who actually graduate and one regarding income from conducting research. As listed in Chapter 2.1, one of the goals of the reform concerns using the resources more efficiently, which in most cases refers to the use of money. Due to the assumption that it is possible to work more efficiently in larger units, the Ministry of Education and Research has reduced funds earmarked for the university's administration. Since the merge, the goal for the board has been to reduce the administration costs by 10% within 2020 (Nord universitet, 2017), which has led to a job freeze regarding increasing the number of people serving the academic staff.

At the same time, the number of academic staff has increased in the years since the merge to meet the knowledgebase requirements among the academic staff from NOKUT. This sector has become more digitalised in a measure to increase efficiency. Over the years, Nord university has introduced ICT systems that have enabled shifting administrative tasks from non-academic to academic staff; for example, the institution has released a digital exam system, a digital system to register set reading lists and digital systems to register learning outcomes and descriptions of the different study programs. These all regard tasks that were previously performed by non-academic staff, and one can problematise whether this represents an efficient use of time. My informants find these tasks demotivating and view them as a time consumer and waste of time. Instead of having a few non-academic staff that know the systems well and use them frequently, the university forces all academic staff to use these systems maybe once or twice a semester, which is not often enough to ever learn the systems well. Gunnes (2018) report that on average, academic staff use 13% of their time on pure administrative tasks³ and from 30-62% on teaching⁴, and the time used on teaching decreases the higher grade level of the employee.

The perceived rigidity and dilatoriness in the workflow to effect a change might represent unwanted effects of the shift of tasks from non-academic towards academic staff and workflow digitalisation. Any educator with course responsibility might enact any change to a course regarding descriptions of learning outcomes or what type of teaching methodology and assessment to use after the end of one course and before the next begins. But in order to do so s/he needs to know the following ICT-systems at our university:

- Canvas → our chosen Learning Management System, which the educators need to use to communicate with the students, create assignments,

³ Administration includes all administrative work: appointments, meetings, reporting, management, etc. at one's own institution, which is not naturally included in any of the other tasks (teaching, academic guidance, research and development work).

⁴ Teaching includes time for planning, preparation and completion of all types of teaching, including practice guidance at your own institution. Continuing education courses, etc., work on study plans, supervision at the bachelor level, conference hours, field trips, exam work, assessment of doctoral degrees or the like. Time for the development of teaching material and study / curriculum should also be included here.

assess assignments, publish announcements, answer students' questions, publish material used in lectures and so on.

- Inspira → Nord University's digital exam system. Every exam must be created in this system.
- EpN (Emneplanlegging på Nett) → an online tool for course planning
- TimeEdit → Resource management and scheduling system
- Leganto → online tool to create the list of set reading

It is not difficult to understand that this feels like meeting The Great Boyg. (Ibsen, 1928)

5.2.2 The constant nagging about research

Another consequence of the merge regards the demand from management about research performed by the academic staff. Several of my informants express that management demands that they publish more, which is due to both the financial system and the demand for a higher level of education among the academic staff. The regulations on supervision of the quality of education in higher education (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017) have become stricter regarding the level of grade they possess. An educator could previously teach at lower levels by being an expert in his/her field; for example, Nord University has had people from Hollywood and Silicon Valley teach courses about movies and gaming. After the tightening of rules and regulations, many educators at Nord University have started on the path towards reaching the associate professor level and higher. There are several ways to accomplish this, but one is by conducting research and getting published and then having their competence reviewed by a committee if they want to avoid the traditional method of gaining a PhD. The level of competence among the academic staff also counts toward the quality assurance process and the accreditation of the university, which has received significant attention at Nord University.

In a report about time pressure in teaching and mentoring students in higher education, Amundsen and Fretland Øygarden (2019) state that several of the aca-

ademic communities highlighted the cross pressure between research and teaching as one potential cause of the teachers' negative assessment of time set aside for teaching and supervision. Amundsen and Fretland Øygarden (2019, p. 18) say that academic staff have a limited amount of time to devote to both teaching and supervision and R&D activity. The role of the teacher cannot be viewed in isolation but always competes with the role of the employees as scientists. Furthermore, Amundsen and Fretland Øygarden (2019) indicate that there might be a problem with unsatisfactory frameworks that should support the two competing activities, mostly in situations when the educator needs to prioritise between the two activities.

5.2.3 “Sorry, I got side-tracked”

A third consequence of the merge regards the time and focus required by these kinds of processes. The time spent on administration represents a source of frustration among the scientific community and professional staff. Several mentioned the mergers in recent years as a task which requires significant administrative time, including both academic and institutional administration (Gunnes, 2018).

Especially during the first year after the merge, copious time was spent on getting to know the new organisation. University of Nordland was organised into faculties with academic staff attached to the faculties, whilst the HiNT was divided into different departments with a strong and large decentralised central administration serving all the departments. When my informants reported feeling that the system has become more bureaucratic, it might be that the chosen model of the new organisation is more difficult to navigate when seeking support or knowledge. There is a sense of the organisation being more compartmental in its functions, as people are sent from one unit to another trying to figure out who for example is responsible for the digital exam system. Is it the exam person at the faculty, the IT department or is it the unit I work in? This represents an exercise that consumes time which the educator probably could have spent in a more useful way.

5.2.4 “It’s us against them” – the post-merger battle

Alienation and a sense of us and them and lack of trust represent further consequences. The educators in my project stated that there is a lack of leadership and sense of direction and that they do not feel supported by the management. The university is spread over a vast geographical area and is a result of a merger of at least two different cultures but likely more, because the old university college was a result of a merger between four different university colleges in three different towns in the mid region of Norway in 1994. Those four institutions worked relentlessly between 1994 and 2015 to become unified with a distributed campus structure. And on the 1st of January 2016 a new merger took place, making HiNT a part of a university with the total amount of nine different campuses with 900 km between the south and north extremes. This time the merge occurred with an institution with a completely different structure and culture.

Harman (2002, p. 110) says:

whether institutions merge or collaborate voluntarily or by edict, developing from different cultures a new integrated culture of shared values and loyalties, attitudes and conditions of work is a mammoth challenge for leaders that needs to be handled sensitively and with relative speed.

Furthermore, Harman (2002) indicates that one of the most important factors for ensuring a successful merger is effective leadership and management. It is important to have a visionary and transformational leadership to manage the task of creating bold policy decisions regarding academic programs, building research capacity as well as improving teaching, resource and staffing matters where you are not able to please all stakeholders.

Some of my informants, especially those most negatively affected by the consequences of the post-merger decisions, do not find that the leadership at Nord University has succeeded. Making the post-merger decision tasks possibly tougher to accept, how Nord University is organised makes the distance from the leadership to the subordinates even greater since there might be 800 km between them, making it difficult to build a relationship.

Time is once again an issue, as the distractions and noise created by the structure reform have taken time away from focusing on the quality of study programs and teaching. It has been a challenging process thus far, as for example Nord University has lost its first dean due to disagreement with the board and the university must reduce the number of campuses from nine to five to save money. A google search results in 20,500 hits regarding news coverage about Nord University⁵. Many conversations around the lunch table have been about these issues rather than how to become better educators.

5.3 A model for raising quality of teaching

Regarding teaching quality, my summarised advice for how to ensure the quality of instruction in the future is illustrated in Figure 11. I recommend that Nord University facilitates a trinity of teaching quality consisting of merited educators, clusters of educators and KOLT.

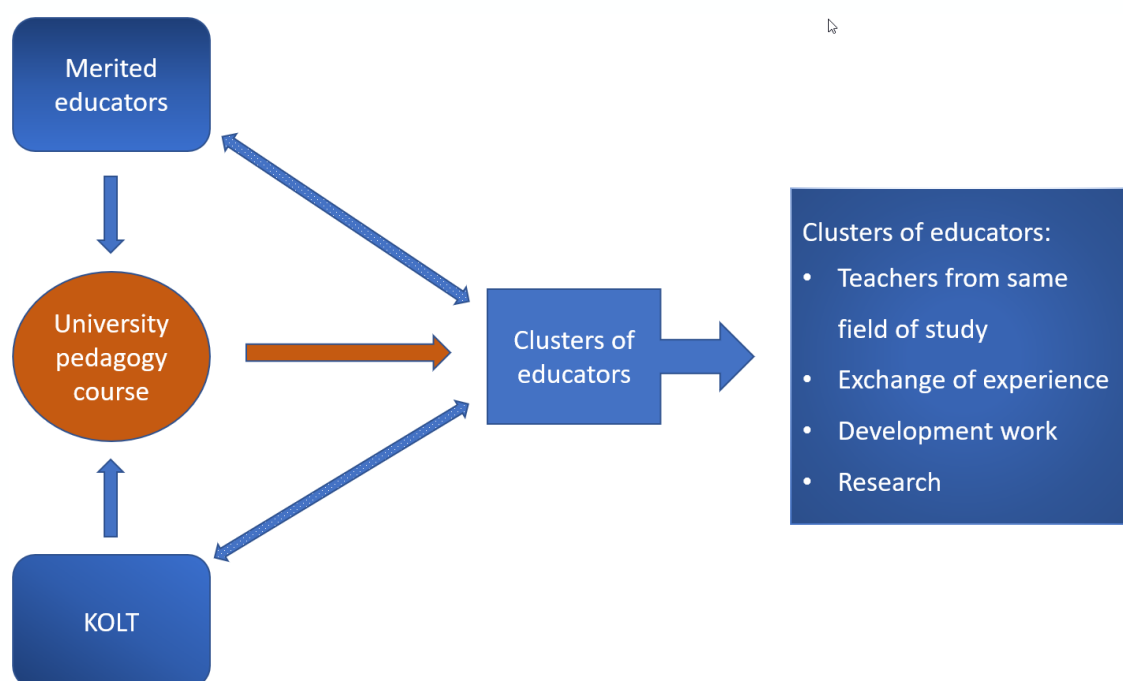


FIGURE 11 The Trinity of Teaching Quality, a model for raising quality of teaching at Nord University.

⁵ Result of search made with the phrase “Nord universitet” on November 6th 2019 and filtered to be News results.

The following section will explain the elements in the figure and provide recommendations based upon my findings and previous discussion.

5.3.1 The scheme of becoming a merited educator

As my project has shown, there are potentially several educators at Nord university who are passionate about teaching and who can be identified through a scheme allowing applicants to become merited. Nord University needs to make use of these educators as a resource. The university has not yet enacted a scheme to become a merited educator, but people are working towards this and will most likely be placed before the board early next year.

To create a successful scheme by which experienced teachers would seek to be reviewed and acquire a raised status, Nord University should listen to the advice given by Grepperud et al. (2016). They say that the educator should be given time and not only a pay increase. They advised granting 6 months of study leave in whole or part for the merited educator to further develop their own teaching. I find that this echoes what my informants stated regarding their own development work and wanting more time for it.

To ensure that the knowledge and competency will be spread further, Grepperud et al. (2016) recommend that the merited educators should help support their faculty's work towards higher quality. I recommend that merited educators should participate in clusters of educators in their subject field for a period of time and that they contribute to the university pedagogy courses to ensure that the course participants will receive the knowledge regarding the most innovative and research-based instructional methods.

5.3.2 Clusters of Educators

Being an educator is traditionally a solitary form of working, as educators often perform all preparations and instructions without the support of a colleague. Be-

ing creative and designing new methods is possible alone, but it is often in conversations with others that one acquires new ideas and innovations (Nijstad & De Dreu, 2002), and leaders must create an organisation that fosters and enables innovation (Kremer, Villamor, & Aguinis, 2019). I recommend that the faculties facilitate the creation of clusters of educators, where teachers from the same fields of study meet to discuss subject-specific challenges regarding the development of for example well-formulated cases for engagement. There will be different approaches regarding how to formulate cases if the subject is fact based or more concerning philosophical dilemmas. I recommend that these clusters should have a limit regarding the number of members, because attempting to join a large group together is much more difficult than a smaller number of people. The meeting location should be a place to be active and hands on when it comes to exchanging experience and performing development work and research to enhance quality of teaching and study programs.

The members in these clusters should include a mixture of inexperienced and experienced teachers. I also believe that a merited educator should be a member or at least a mentor for a cluster. The advisors at KOLT should also be a member to ensure that knowledge transfer occurs both from KOLT and vice versa, which would be valuable and beneficial for both parties.

5.3.3 KOLT

KOLT – centre for learning and technology – is a unit that serves the educators regarding pedagogy and the use of ICT. KOLT facilitates teachers who want to change their instructional methods, who want to use ICT more actively and who want to perform development work regarding their own teaching.

KOLT instructs and delivers content to the university pedagogy course as part of its current contributions.

5.3.4 University pedagogy course

KOLT has played an active part in the university pedagogy course for some time, however the current design of this course is not sufficient to fulfil its intended

outcomes. What is wanted is educators that embrace the new more student-centred methods. Until now, the participants of the course have mostly been provided the traditional lecture. What about showing instead of telling?

I recommend that the design of the course mirrors the type of teaching desired to be delivered by the educators at Nord University. The course needs to expose the participants to student-centred teaching. It is easier to embrace first-hand experienced instructional methods compared to those you have only read or heard about. To once again quote R. Berger (2017), "I'm an institutionalized man, now." For people who have spent years of their life in one system and succeeded and prospered in that system, it seems to be challenging to find other ways to deliver teaching beyond one's experience. This was also found by Sekkingstad and Fossøy (2018).

5.4 The aftermath of the "Structure reform"

Experiencing a merger takes its toll on an organisation and demands much from the leadership, as Harman (2002) pointed out. This project has not focused on the leadership of the merger process, however since leadership and the effect of wanted policy represented one of the four themes among my findings, this clearly affects the educators and their work. My informants wanted to be seen and heard and apparently feel they have not been. Having a leadership that uses methods from relationship management and servant leadership and that holds diversity intelligence might lead to enhanced inclusion and equitable treatment of the workforce (Sims, 2018; Spurkeland, 2005, 2013). This would prevent the feelings of alienation and distance between leaders and subordinates as reported by the informants in this study.

Four years have nearly passed since the merger, and can the chosen administrative model of the university be considered a success? Harman (2002) noted that it is important to bring elements that worked in the old organisation into the new one. One suggestion is for the leadership to examine how HiNT was organised regarding the use of non-academic staff prior to the merge, since Nord University has become university with a decentralised campus structure and needs

to use the non-academic staff as efficiently as possible, at least if the university wants to ease the burden on the educator regarding tasks that reportedly felt time consuming and demotivating.

5.5 Evaluation of my project and suggestions for further research

As mentioned earlier, I could find little trace of the four types of teachers presented by Amundsen and Haakstad (2018) among my informants. Even if my group of informants was fairly attuned regarding how they perceived teaching, I might have achieved a different result if all 51 had answered or if I had asked educators from the traditional university and not university colleges.

My informants are from parts of the university that were previously HiNT, where vocational trainings such as teaching and nursing represented the dominant study programs. It was traditionally possible to distinguish between universities and university colleges based upon the trend that the universities conducted the outstanding research and housed the discipline subjects while the university colleges' main task was to provide vocational education. If my informants were from parts of Nord University that come from the university tradition, my findings might have been different. As my informants stated, the focus has been and still is on teaching, which differs from the established "truth" about educators in higher education.

There are however still many assumptions. In the future I recommend further studies towards what types of teaching methodology that are being used at Nord University. I would also like the surveys conducted by NOKUT, both the student survey and the educator survey, to be more specific when asking questions regarding the type of teaching/instructions provided in order to avoid truism and assumptions in the future.

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