



Log in

| Register



! On **Monday 24 August 06:00 – 20:00 GMT** we'll be making some site updates on Taylor & Francis Online. You'll still be able to search, browse and read our articles, where access rights already apply, but registration, purchasing, activation of tokens, eprints and other features of Your Account will be unavailable during this scheduled release.

Journal

Teaching Education >

Latest Articles



Open access

228 0

Views

0

CrossRef citations to date

Altmetric



Articles

A Fast Track course for newly arrived immigrant teachers in Sweden

Catarina Economou   

Received 23 Apr 2019, Accepted 18 Nov 2019, Published online: 06 Jan 2020

Received 23 Apr 2019, Accepted 18 Nov 2019, Published online: 06 Jan 2020



[Full Article](#)

Showing ✓

[Figures & data](#) >

[References](#) >

[Citations](#) >

[Metrics](#) >

[Licensing](#) >

[Reprints & Permissions](#) >[PDF](#)

ABSTRACT

The Swedish welfare state has social protection policies focusing on labour market participation. Initiatives have been introduced after the increase of asylum seekers in 2015, focusing on so-called 'fast tracks'. In this paper I consider one of these fast track courses aimed at newly arrived teachers wishing to continue their teaching career in Sweden. Based on interviews and observational data I have followed one cohort throughout their course. The research aims for an understanding of the teachers'

experiences from their own perspective as well as from the stakeholders'. The theoretical framework is mainly taken from the concepts of the capital market introduced by Bourdieu. In light of the findings, while the education the participants receive may be useful in order to understand the educational system, many are disappointed to find that fast track courses do not give them a clear advantage in terms of finding a faster way into the Swedish labour market. In addition, there are tendencies for local teacher communities to devalue the qualifications of this group. Generally, the emphasis on 'fast tracks' may ignore the need of individuals to complete formal Swedish education and to navigate complex processes of nationally set standards of professional requirements, which impede a fast integration process.

KEYWORDS: Newly arrived immigrant teachers, Sweden, integration, labour market

1. Introduction

In the age of globalisation and migration, the issue of education and the labour market in terms of both policy and practice is in focus. The international mobility of highly educated and qualified people is growing, with teachers playing an important role in the labour market (Reid & Collins, 2013). In many western countries,

research can be found on teachers with foreign teaching qualifications and their integration with the educational system (Collins & Reid, 2012; Deters, 2011; Dewilde, 2013; Schmidt & Schneider, 2016). One issue that has been raised are that the skills and experiences of the newly arrived teachers are not recognised by employers and colleagues. Another challenge is the several barriers they have to overcome to be able to obtain certifications.

Table 1. Summary of Data collection.



CSV Display Table

From 2015 onwards, large numbers of refugees have entered Sweden. For this reason, the government announced that certain 'fast tracks' would be introduced for different professions, thereby allowing newly arrived migrants with the right skills to move into occupations in need of more labour power. The government initially arranged talks with labour unions, employers' organisations and the Public Employment Service to discuss the demand for employees and possible measures to utilise newly arrived migrants' skills. The first fast track was introduced in 2015 for chefs, with subsequent fast tracks for various occupations, such as doctors, builders, painters, social workers as well as teachers. At the time of writing, 14 different

professions are involved. Depending on the occupation, fast track measures can include validation of a profession, evaluation of educational or vocational skills according to professional regulations, Swedish language education focusing on the particular vocational area, and supplementary educational measures.

Swedish education has experienced a shortage of teachers for many years, especially in the natural science subjects, mathematics and languages at secondary-school level; this shortage also concerns both primary and pre-school teachers (Statistics Sweden, Forecast Institute, [SCB], [2017](#)). The fast track for teachers and preschool teachers was introduced in 2016 and was established in cooperation with the social partners the Swedish Teachers' Union, the National Union of Teachers, the Employers' Organisation for the Swedish Service Sector, as well as the Swedish Public Employment Service, other relevant government agencies and six Swedish universities.

This fast track course can be characterised as an introduction to the Swedish school system offered to newly arrived individuals with a background in pedagogy. Theoretical courses are combined with work experience and language courses in professional Swedish over a 26-week period. The outline of the course, which is the same for all groups nationwide, is threefold:

- a. Content courses at the university, approximately two days

per week, covering the Swedish school system, its history, organisation and values, social relations and pedagogical leadership, pedagogical relations, communication and learning.

b. Course in professional Swedish one day per week

c. Workplace learning, approximately two days per week.

Participants in this study have a background as teachers in primary school, secondary school or preschool in Syria. (Due to the large number of Syrian refugees, this particular labour market education was aimed at individuals with knowledge of Arabic). To give participants quick access to course content, both Swedish and Arabic are used as languages of instruction. This requires that bilingual teachers are involved in the course. Course literature is mainly in Swedish, with some translations into Arabic when available.

After completing this 26-week course, participants who intend to work in Swedish schools then undertake the process of obtaining a Swedish teacher certificate. The path to a national certification for teachers varies and is based on earlier education and professional experience. Some participants can take the Complimentary Education for Foreign Teachers: the ULV programme, while others have to take the programme for ordinary teachers. Participants in the course also receive

individual guidance on how to proceed if they wish to apply for certification.

This article centres on participants from a case study involving a small group of newly arrived refugee teachers in Sweden doing one of the fast track courses. However, it is important to recognise that these teachers, even if they are from the same country and speak the same language, comprise a heterogeneous group with different backgrounds, priorities and circumstances. As the focus in the study does not concern their refugee status, and to avoid confusion, I will use the term 'newly arrived immigrant teachers' [NAITs] – as opposed to the term used in international research, 'internationally educated teachers' [IETs]. Nevertheless, terms such as immigrant teacher are introduced when they arise in the literature.

This article draws from a study that took place in a university in Sweden that offered a fast track course for NAITs. The research sought to explore how the NAITs integrated with the new educational context through an introductory course.

1.1. Literature review

In previous studies of migrant teachers, some discussions have focused on the difficulties of integrating migrant teachers' qualifications and skills into national educational systems. Obstacles such as limited transferability of certificates, lengthy

bureaucratic and expensive procedures regarding validation, and the discrimination and undervaluation of teachers' skills are discussed in various studies (Georgi, 2016; Karakasoglu & Dogmus, 2016; Ratkovic' & Pietka-Nykaza, 2016; Schmidt & Schneider, 2016).

One issue is the path to employment (Collins & Reid, 2012; Walsh, Brigham, & Wang, 2011). For example, immigrant teachers work as supply teachers, private teachers or volunteer teachers with hope of finding a secure teacher position in the near future (Janusch, 2014; Manik, 2014; Pollock, 2010; Walsh et al., 2011). Those teachers who find a position are often employed by schools that cannot find staff easily and that are often situated in low socio-economic areas. Thus, the teachers are faced with many problems, such as poor discipline and low motivation among students (Collins & Reid, 2012; Fee, 2010).

Research further shows several challenges for migrant teachers once they gain a teaching position. Obstacles relate to socialisation and adjustment to new curriculums and teaching practices, including classroom management and discipline, as well as interaction with students' parents (Bense, 2014; Fee, 2010; Janusch, 2014). Discrimination in the form of 'othering', that is to say categorisation on unclear grounds, is also frequently reported and documented in studies (e.g. Collins & Reid, 2012; Manik, 2014). One study about refugee women

teachers show how some of them can embrace their teacher identity, but a large number struggle to enter or give up the teaching profession due to age or financial difficulties (Ratkovic & Pietka-Nykaza, 2016). Apart from this study, there is a lack of research focusing on newly arrived refugees who were qualified teachers in their home country and their adjustment to a new context.

However, these different obstacles presented above are overshadowed by communication difficulties when the language of instruction is different from that of the immigrant teacher's native language. These difficulties may concern accentedness, not understanding the educational terms or cultural meanings, or the overall ability of comprehension and self-expression (Bense, 2014; Fee, 2010; Janusch, 2014; Remennick, 2002).

These findings are in line with the Swedish context, which identifies similar barriers, even if research is scarce. In a longitudinal study, Sandlund (2010) problematises the role of existing discourses in the Swedish educational system that idealise the Swedish school and devalue the experiences and qualifications of foreign teachers, mainly with refugee backgrounds. In other studies (Jönsson & Rubinstein Reich, 2006), a group of immigrant teachers were interviewed after completing supplementary teacher training courses. The findings show how these teachers construct their professional identity in

relation to, and often in contrast to, what they perceive as a 'Swedish school culture'. One issue concerns what promotes or restrains possibilities of getting employment. Teachers using an 'assimilatory strategy' (adapting to the expected behaviour and norms of the local community) were likely to obtain permanent employment. However, those immigrant teachers who insisted on their own convictions seemed to risk not being regarded as cooperative, and were thus not employed.

Bigestans (2015) studied the experiences of teachers who after language courses and additional courses found employment as certified teachers in Swedish schools. An important issue brought forth in the study is the challenges teachers face regarding participating in the schools' community of practice and communicating through Swedish as an additional language. Bigestans concludes these challenges are connected to the teachers' background in different educational systems, where different teacher-learner relationships are prevalent. Against the background of differences in educational contexts, Bigestans hypothesises that it will be problematic for foreign teachers to understand both the required teacher role and the pupils' active involvement in Swedish classroom interaction as a result of them coming from a rather different and, often, more authoritarian school system.

This brief summary of current research presents an overview of

the primary obstacles immigrant teachers encountered on their path to employment and in their role as educators. However, the role of the migrant teacher in providing an opportunity for diversifying the teaching force has also been seen in more positive terms, where individual teachers are regarded as being able to contribute by acting as role models for migrant students – they are bridge-builders between migrant parents and the school system or language translators (Georgi, 2016). Though it is assumed that these newly arrived teachers can be role models for minority students, this is contradicted in a study by Rotter and Timpe (2016), who interviewed a large number of German students, with or without a migration background. Their findings indicate that students were not concerned with the teachers' migration background; rather, they focused on how well the teachers carried out their teaching. In practice, while some teachers are comfortable taking on a particular responsibility for teaching migrant students, others reject this position as discriminatory and prefer to focus on maintaining a professional identity unrelated to their migrant background (Georgi, 2016).

1.2. Research questions

This study reveals common issues concerning a group of newly arrived professionals with refugee backgrounds in Sweden following the introductory course 'fast track' and their integration with the educational system of the receiving country, Sweden. To

understand the teachers' experiences from their own perspective and from the stakeholders', the research investigates the following questions:

What obstacles/barriers and possibilities do the newly arrived immigrant teachers encounter?

What assets/strengths do they have according to themselves and stakeholders?

This understanding can be considered a crucial factor in the success of new teachers functioning in the Swedish school system, and it also can shed light on issues of broader interest for labour market integration efforts, as well as specific course design.

2. Theoretical framework

Bourdieu's (1990) sociological concepts *field*, *habitus* and *capital* are a useful frame to analyse social power relations and challenges in the NAITs recertification process.

According to Bourdieu, society is divided into spheres of actions which he terms 'fields'. Within these fields, power relations and conflicts play out. Each position within the field is determined by the individual's habitus; their past experiences, history, skills,

performances, social class and upbringing all asserting influence. When a person's habitus matches the social field everything runs smoothly, but when there is a mismatch conflicts may arise. For the NAITs the transition from working in the Syrian school context to being educated for the Swedish educational and academic field involves several other actors as stakeholders, supervisors and future employers. All the actors in the fast track course may have different goals and power as well as habitus and these may lead to conflicts and negotiations. The different capital the involved actors have – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – are the foundations of power-relations.

What determines the position of individuals in the social field depends on how individuals make use of different forms of capital and how, or if, they are recognised within society. Social capital comprises relationships and personal networks, and economic capital money and possessions. Cultural capital comprises the individual's qualifications, knowledge and skills, and also language and means of expressions. In this study, the immigrants have a certain amount of cultural capital; however, they lack it when it comes to skills in the majority language.

The linguistic capital is of particular interest to this study. Languages have different values within a society and these values correspond with the hierarchy of power relations (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996). Languages are

not merely a method of communication, but also a mechanism of power. The language one uses is designated by the relational position in the field. Bourdieu developed the notion of linguistic capital to theorise accents as hierarchies of different ways of speaking within a language (French), but in this context there is a focus on the hierarchy of different languages. Speakers of minority languages are subjects to conscious or unconscious positioning, and they can be perceived as being less competent. In contrast, the socially legitimate language functions as cultural capital and can be a form of economic capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996). In the field of education languages play a particular role in this hierarchy of differences. In this socio-political context the teachers and participants perceive the value and status of languages – the use of the majority language is accepted, whereas others are not, especially during workplace periods. Knowledge of which language functions as capital is decided by the groups with the largest capital volume, which then results in a reproduction of prevailing power relations (Bourdieu, 1992). The participants in the fast track course should, besides learning about the Swedish school context, also learn the Swedish language to be able to get their certificates in the near future. The participants were also expected to communicate in Swedish during workplace periods, although there were no language requirements in Swedish for the course.

Finally, symbolic capital can be a kind of power which in a

legitimate way requires an acknowledgement of, for example, the majority language of a country. Al Ariss and Syed (2011, p. 291) further define symbolic power as an individual's power to deploy the other forms of capital. It is this form of symbolic power they adopt when they have been recognised and legitimised by others in the field. In this study, it is interesting to see what symbolic capital exists in the fast track course for NAITs. In addition to this, Bourdieu also uses the concept of *symbolic violence* to describe power relations and hierarchies. He defines it as a mild, almost invisible violence which the victims do not see and which is exercised in a symbolic way by communication or by lack of recognition.

With the starting point in Bourdieu's concepts of capitals the different resources the NAITs bring, as well as the barriers they meet, will be visible in their participation in the introductory course and their encounters with the Swedish education system.

3. Method

In order to explore and understand what obstacles and possibilities the NAITs meet during their integration process in the Swedish school context and what assets they bring, the study has mainly a qualitative research design. In accordance with the triangulation approach, the qualitative interviews supported and

specified the results from surveys. The findings are analysed with the help of and informed by Bourdieu's theory of field, habitus and capital, as the NAITs recertification process within the fast track course and integration into a new school context is viewed as a power embedded mechanism.

3.1. Data collection and participants

The research site was a large Swedish university (theoretical courses) and different schools (workplace learning) offering a fast track course for newly arrived teachers. Initially, the programme had 35 participants from Syria (16 men and 19 women), but two did not continue after the first two days. The participants had been in Sweden for a period of three months to two years, and they had basic knowledge of Swedish.

As a researcher, I was a participant-observer situated within the participants' everyday experiences in the programme for one to two days every week during their courses and workplace time from December 2017 to May 2018.

To explore the obstacles/barriers to and possibilities for workforce integration the NAITs face, a socially-oriented method of qualitative explanatory research was used; this allows an in-depth understanding of both individual and group experiences. In addition, critical ethnography, with its democratic outlook, was used to go beyond people's daily experiences to examine power

relations and taken-for-granted assumptions (Goldstein, 2003; Madison, 2005). Data were collected through surveys (where the results gave ideas for further probing questions in interviews), focus-group interviews and individual interviews as described below and summarised in [Table 1](#).

The surveys were conducted during the introduction period (labelled A), during the first days of the programme and again during the final days (labelled B). The surveys were translated into Arabic and English to ensure their suitability for the participants. The answers given in Arabic were then translated into Swedish by a translator or the Arabic teacher. The surveys were developed by the researcher to obtain the information needed for identifying the study's research questions. Survey A consisted of seven open questions and survey B of nine open questions. Survey A focused on questions about expectations of the course and of their future professional careers. Survey B focused on differences between the Swedish and Syrian schools, how participants' competences were acknowledged, and in what way the fast track course gave an understanding of the Swedish school system and way of teaching. In total, 32 participants completed the initial survey, with 29 completing the final survey. Those who did not answer the surveys were absent on the day they were conducted.

A minor survey was also conducted with the school principals at

the participants' workplaces (six out of eight). Moreover, interviews were held with the participants' supervisors (seven) to extend the perspectives of the study from that of the participants' experiences to the wider institutional and structural aspects of the recertification process. These two methods had similar themes as those directed to the participants in their interviews.

In addition to the data mentioned above, a focus was placed on 12 of the participants who were interviewed at the start of the programme and at their workplace with their supervisors (seven of them). The main criteria for selection were to obtain maximum variation regarding gender (six females and six men), age and teacher background. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, and the interview guide provided a structure that helped to uncover different perspectives of the participants on a special issue in a dialogical way (Witzel & Reiter, 2012). The guide yielded a list of ten questions, starting with broad questions and concluding with more specific questions. Follow-up and more probing questions were asked during the interviews.

3.2. Methods of data analysis

The first step of the data analysis process was the transcribing of the interviews and organising the different sources according to central topics.

In the second step, the data were read several times and a comparative analysis was applied to find repeating threads and patterns (Nohl, 2010, p. 210). In the coding process, I made a list of topics that were repeated in the interviews, documents and observations. In the third step, the topics were assembled into several themes (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch 2011; Watt Boolsen, 2007). During this process, the scope of study was limited and the data organised to answer my research questions.

The chosen methods have some shortcomings. A conclusion from the analyses is that the option to answer in different languages was important. Most participants chose to write in Arabic, it being their strongest language. The option to use another language may have affected the subtlety and depth of responses. Responses can be influenced by translations, which may have had an impact on their understanding because the original words and formulations were lost. Even the translation of the survey into English and Arabic by only one professional translator may have compromised reliability.

The findings in this study are limited to the perspectives raised by the 32 participants and 13 stakeholders (principals and supervisors). While their perspectives cannot possibly represent those of all NAITs or all stakeholders, they are, nevertheless, indicative of the kinds of challenges, barriers and opportunities/assets faced by the respondents.

4. Findings

This study aims to understand the NAITs' experiences of integration into the Swedish educational system from their own perspective and from that of the stakeholders. The study's participants arrived in Sweden as NAITs with a refugee background, and with their respective habitus and capital. However, in order to remain in their field of education and keep working as teachers, they had to go through a recertification process.

In this section, the results are presented in accordance with the different research questions. The first part outlines the challenges/barriers they encountered during the fast track course, while the second presents the possibilities the course gives them and the assets they bring, according to their own self-perception and that of stakeholders.

4.1. Obstacles/barriers

4.1.1. Lack of recognition and integration

About half of the participants in the interviews and surveys expressed negative experiences of their workplace:

I don't do anything. I don't say anything, I only help

students who are weak in maths and those who are newly arrived. I just sit with four or five pupils. These are the only things I work with. And I am just the school break monitor over and over again. I feel that I am not welcome at this workplace. I know Swedish. It is not the language that is the problem. I do not know why they have bad attitudes. In Syria everyone respected me, and being a teacher was my status. Though I am not content, I have to pretend that I am so the supervisor will write me a good recommendation. (C4)

Imran shows how excluded he feels at his workplace. Despite having a good knowledge of Swedish, his competences are not used; instead of being within the teaching practice, he is assigned the role of student break monitor. Although he is disappointed, he seems to have succumbed to the pressure to conform. Thus, he uses an assimilatory strategy to pass the course.

Ana faced prejudice from the school staff with respect to her country of origin and experienced exclusion on the grounds that she is different. Consequently, she loses not only her sense of identity but also her status as a teacher. Despite her being satisfied with the theoretical courses, she concludes during her workplace experience that she does not want to work as a

teacher in Sweden:

Well, before the workplace practice I had self-confidence. But when we get there, we are not considered normal. That is to say, we come from a different culture, another country than the usual one. This affected me, eh, depressed me. They did not accept me as a teacher. I don't want to be a teacher here. I have wasted my time, seven months. (A4)

These utterances reflect how the cultural capital the participants have brought from their home country – that is, their teaching education and experiences – is neither validated nor respected. Rather, it is misrecognised and the actors are using symbolic power on the dominated group. Moreover, it seems that those influencing their experiences are not held accountable, which makes some of the NAITs feel 'depressed' and excluded.

Another issue contributing to negative reflections was the participants' initial expectations of what the 'fast track' course would give them in terms of certification and qualifications. In time, these expectations were not met Ouna describes the situation:

At the beginning of the fast track, they weren't so clear with us about, eh, what to expect and what to do during the course. And many of us very much

expected that we would be hired as teachers in Sweden thereafter. We spent six months here when we could have spent six months in SFI (Swedish for immigrants course). Now I know, I have to study some time to get this teacher accreditation. (O4)

The realisation that the 'fast track' course alone is insufficient as a means to becoming legitimate teachers in Sweden causes some participants to feel disillusioned: however, others are prepared to go through the long process in order to be employed as teachers.

4.1.2. Language issues – lack of Swedish

Almost all of the NAITs considered their lack of Swedish to be the greatest barrier to integration. Several believed it would have been more beneficial to have taken a course where the level of Swedish was higher:

He thinks it would have been better if they started the education when their competence in the Swedish language was better. It is the language that hinders him from taking initiative and creating the role he wants. But as a teacher he has great competence and a lot of experience. This differs him from a teacher who e.g. is not qualified. (Translator – D4)

This quotation is noteworthy as it highlights the interrelation between the loss of cultural capital in the form of language and the wish to fulfil a course through doing one's best to get recognition of one's qualifications and experiences. The stakeholders held the same view:

I think this 'fast track' was a very good idea. But to send someone here who does not understand anything and only sits there is not good, as I see it. She cannot understand, cannot talk and cannot ask any questions. (supervisor to A4)

I cannot use their competence in class, and I wish it had been possible to do so. And the reason for this is that they don't speak a word of Swedish. (supervisor to G4)

The stakeholders' remarks concerning the participants' deficiencies in the majority language is representative. All the interviewed stakeholders, both school principals and supervisors in the workplaces, were critical of the participants' inadequacies in the majority language.

During the university course on learning about the Swedish educational system, the language issue was not an obstacle as the content was held in both Arabic and Swedish. However, it was incongruous with the periods the participants spent at the work practice in schools. Here, most often a monolingual

concept prevailed; thus, the participants found it hard to communicate with their colleagues and the students. The individual then realises that the lack of language competence in the majority language deviates from the norm and is thus not legitimate.

Based on Bourdieu's view of language, linguistic capital is linked to power, resources and the maintenance of limits based on notions of national identity, as confirmed by language (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996). For the NAITs of this study, it is important to have the Swedish language as a professional language. Moreover, learning the Swedish language contributes to them being understood and being able to develop friendships with peers outside their own linguistic community. The statements about the Swedish language can therefore be understood in terms of Bourdieu's discussion of language as symbolic capital: a capital that gives the dominant groups power and prestige in different areas of society, and to which the dominated groups must relate.

4.1.3. Clashes with a new educational context

Notwithstanding language issues, the most noteworthy themes discovered in the material concerning participants' encounters with Swedish schools were issues of teaching styles, including their knowledge of technical equipment and social relations.

The university courses, which included questions about social relations in schools, were appreciated by the NAITs, with many encountering new insights they found to be useful at the workplaces. Ouna describes why:

Most things we received at the university we saw it here [workplace] in practice. It was really related, and very basic information. Like, for example, social relations. We need it as immigrants; we need it. So, we know how to deal with colleagues and the children.

(O4)

The participants genuinely desired and aspired to understand the new context. One of the most surprising issues for them was the relation between teachers and students in Swedish schools compared to the more authoritarian system in the Syrian educational context:

The students feel free, and they don't feel there is a gap between them and the teacher, as in Syria. There is no barrier. So, they can ask whatever they want. I would say it is a transparent school system. There is freedom in the classes. And there is more interaction between the students and the teachers here in Sweden. (K4)

As this quotation reflects, the NAITs were positive towards the

more free and 'caring' relationship between teacher and student in the Swedish school. However, this relationship was questioned by some when they entered the school workplace:

Här saknar eleverna respekt för läraren. Problemet här är, att vissa elever kommer till klassen och de vill inte lära sig någonting, men de ska vara med i klassen ändå. Och det här leder till, det påverkar andra elever att lära sig något. Det finns inget att sätta emot och det finns ingen balans i relationerna. (B4)

Here, the students don't have respect for the teacher. The problem is that some of the students come to the class not wanting to learn anything, but they have to be in the class with the others anyway. This affects the others students who want to learn. There is nothing to counter this, and there is no balance in the relationships. (B4)

This is one of many statements that illustrate the clash between the NAITs' former teacher role in their home country and the attitudes they met in Swedish schools. All the participants anticipated a range of other transitions to be undertaken following what they learnt on the university courses and what they had experienced at the workplaces. One of these concerns the teaching style:

The Swedish way of teaching is better. Pupils can be in

a group, can discuss with each other ... In Syria, the teacher decides everything, and the students should respond according to the teacher's way of thinking and what information they get from the teacher. But here in Sweden the student is free to look for information from the Internet, from different books ... So the students have the freedom to ask questions and not just write exactly what the teacher says. In Syria, it is important with quantity. But in Sweden quality is important. (C4)

This system is better than in Syria. In Syria, the children learn to swim in theory, but here the students go in the water and learn to swim in practice. (G4)

The following illustrates how the NAITs appreciated the new Swedish context, including the role of the student:

Here, the students are self-dependent. They need to read by themselves and achieve by themselves. So, the teacher here is a kind of mentor, supervising, leading in the right direction. But, the teacher does not explain all the text word by word, for example. (O4)

These new insights caused the NAITs to conclude that they had to change their role as teachers and adapt to the new context.

Another obstacle for the NAITs to overcome was the realisation

that they were not used to technical equipment in the classroom, as technology may not have been as readily accessible in the schools of their home country:

It is difficult with technology; I do not have an Ipad to use. But the school, the pupils and the teachers, all can use an Ipad. All, but me. In Syria, we use the blackboard and the book. (O4)

Teaching styles, including knowledge of technical support and relations issues, show how the participants have to strive to create new social and cultural capital. Primarily, there is a clash between what is learnt on the courses at university level and what happens at the workplace practice.

These findings about lack of recognition, language deficits and other clashes show tensions and a mismatch between the participants' habitus and the field of education and school in the new context. The tensions are the outcome of power relations that are embedded in the process of the course as well as the demand for the NAITs to change habitus and exchange their cultural capital in a short period of time.

4.2. Possibilities and assets

In the interviews and surveys, the majority of the participants disclosed that the fast track course was a good introduction to

Swedish school system and that it provided them with a good understanding of the different aspects of Swedish teaching and the curriculum. And this made it possible for them to continue their studies. One of the participants related:

I learnt about history and the organisation of the Swedish school, methods and pedagogy in schools and also an overall picture of the differences between Syrian and Swedish schools. I want to work as a teacher here. (Y4).

Participants also believed that practical experiences are of greater help than more theoretical education, not least with building new contacts, thereby adding to their social capital.

What assets the participants bring follows below.

4.2.1. Language issues – multilingualism as a capital

As mentioned above, the multilingualism and concepts of translanguaging worked well during the theoretical courses, but it collided with the monolingual norms at the workplace.

However, other views are also found in the material, as seen in these representative statements from the interviews:

I attend many English classes with all the age groups. I also attend study support, English lessons for ehm, Arabic speakers. So, I was much help for them. And I

am also doing English study support for many other students. I am taking the lead alone. And this is my specialty; this is what I studied before. (O4)

It is an asset with the languages: Arabic and English and Swedish. In some learning contexts, it is good that there will be many languages. The participant can help many students. We need more languages in school. (stakeholder, supervisor)

These examples and utterances above reflect how the participants' linguistic capital is appreciated and taken in account in the educational field during the workplace periods. Here, it seems that the participants and the students they meet in schools can engage in meaningful activities, through allowing them to utilise their entire linguistic repertoire. This is seen as an important asset. Researchers such as Blackledge and Creese (2011, p. 201) argue for 'a release from monolingual, instructional approaches', and they advocate teaching bilingual children 'by means of bilingual pedagogy, with two or more languages used alongside each other'. In fact, making use of students' full linguistic capital is *considered to be fundamental for learning in multilingual contexts*.

4.2.1.1. Interculturality and integration

Answers survey A:

The new teacher can add a lot through his or her enthusiasm and through integration in the work. The presence of new experiences from new countries can give pleasure and make Swedish students curious. It should push all students to learn, read and compare different cultures and ways of living. (B4)

I think I can clarify aspects of Swedish society for immigrants and how they can be integrated and be active members in society. (E4)

Many of the participants see themselves as experts regarding (inter)cultural questions, that is, as role models for the minority students and their parents. Moreover, they regard themselves as being more sensitive to the students' experiences and needs. For these reasons, they have great value in terms of cultural capital. However, this contradicts previous findings which indicate that immigrant teachers are not valued more than others among students (Rotter & Timpe, 2016). It is evident here that the NAITS have a positive view of what they can contribute in Swedish schools.

4.2.1.2. Education and work experience

Answers survey A:

With 32 years of teaching in my home country, I have great experience as an educator. I have worked in

primary and secondary schools, and also at a university for teachers for ten years. Additionally, I have composed curriculums. I can work teaching Arabic as a native language. Therefore, I am more competent than the Swedish teachers as I understand the culture and environment of the Arabic pupils. I can solve the problems of the Arabic students because I am aware of them. I want to practice my profession; it has been part of me since 1985. (G4)

I think and I hope to be an active member in the Swedish school and community, and I hope to find myself giving students all of my language experience, thus affecting them positively and pushing them to a very good level of the English language. (O4)

The participants believed that not only had they good qualifications and the same competencies as their Swedish colleagues but also valuable experience and knowledge about cultural diversity. While the NAITs were open to embracing new pedagogies and teacher–student relations, they could also reflect on the efficacy of some aspects of the pedagogies used in their home country. For example, Ouna commented, ‘With more respect, and more discipline than I am used to in Syrian schools, this will lead to better work and results. And it doesn’t have to include fear in the relations, only respect’.

In these last issues there is a match with the field and habitus which impacts the symbolic value of the participants' capital. It shows how the field may be diversified and open to new conceptions.

5. Conclusions and discussion

The NAITs experienced the introductory course 'fast track' as positive, as they gained many new insights and knowledge about the Swedish school system, both in practice and in theory. The NAITs believe that they can contribute with their knowledge of their language of origin, Arabic, and with their immigration experience – cultural and social capital, which they think should be valued. In many cases, they see themselves as 'bridgebuilders', which indicates their ability to help and to understand newly arrived students and other immigrant students.

The greatest obstacle to adjusting to the Swedish educational context was communication at the workplace – their abilities in Swedish were insufficient, according to the participants themselves and to the stakeholders. Other barriers concerned a lack of integration at the workplaces, which is connected to the language issue. There were also some incongruities with the new educational system regarding different teaching styles and

relations compared to their home country.

One conclusion of this study is that the weakest part of the introductory course is the workplace periods, though valued by most of the NAITs. The workplace tensions experienced by the newcomers seemed, in some cases, to have a devastating effect, and they had the propensity to alienate them from the teaching profession. One reason for this tension is the participants' lack of language skills in the majority language. Other reasons might be the monolingual and monocultural concept of the schools, that is, not having the same the same approach to multilingualism as the theoretical parts of the course. Wei (2018) claims that students and teachers through translanguaging and multilingualism can go beyond socially created monolingual educational systems and engage in meaningful activities that challenge old structures and norms. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of capital, immigrant teachers would play an important role in transforming the linguistic market of the school. By allowing them to be persons of authority and represent a profession with power, they would be able to question the existing language hierarchy in education and make educational stakeholders and teachers aware of the importance of minority languages.

Another conclusion is that the recertification process seems to be one-sided, with no intercultural aspects, at least not during

the workplace periods. An enrichment potential of a more reciprocal process has to be considered, as the NAITs have experienced migration, different teaching practices and language shifts. The whole school community can benefit from helping and integrating the NAITs in their new workplaces and by giving them opportunities to present their past experiences and perspectives to their new colleagues.

Given these findings, newly arrived immigrant teachers need more support when it comes to the workplace in order to develop their professional identity based on their experiences and the interplay and understanding of the new educational context. There is a need for mentorship at the workplace, which could be a means of bridging the gap between the newcomer's former ways of knowing and current practice. Mentors could be schoolteachers or postgraduate students who have built up expertise and who are sensitive to the NAITs' different learning styles, and who are willing to help them extend these. Moreover, school staff could take a more active part in the NAITs' experiences and become familiar with different learning styles, to create a space for enriching culture. In addition, NAITs need a clearer picture of the certification requirements through more accurate information. However, the schools that educate the participants need to be instructed on the benefits of having a diverse teaching force, reflecting the full spectrum of cultures and traditions prevailing. In Sweden, the ethnic diversity of the

teaching staff has not kept pace with the diversity of the students. The percentage of immigrants in the teaching profession lags behind the percentage of immigrants in the population overall.

The findings and conclusions of this study are limited to the small data corpus. Therefore, they cannot be generalised.


Furthermore, the context of the study is situated within specific historical and national boundaries. However, despite these shortcomings, the findings and conclusions can contribute to an understanding of the circumstances of newly arrived teachers and to the loss of forms of symbolic power presented. The lack of status as competent teachers and a lack of recognition of their experience, formal qualifications and social networks can hinder the NAITs' desire to become legitimised teachers, which is something Sweden is in need of presently.


Disclosure statement



No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.





References

1. Al Ariss, A., & Syed, J. (2011). Capital mobilization of skilled

migrants: A Relational Perspective. *British Journal of Management*, 22(2), 286–304. [[Crossref](#)], [[Web of Science ®](#)], [[Google Scholar](#)]  find full text





2. Bense, K. (2014). Languages aren't as important here: German migrant teachers' experiences in Australian language classes. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 41(4), 485–497. [[Crossref](#)], [[Web of Science ®](#)], [[Google Scholar](#)]  find full text
3. Bigestans, A. (2015). *Utmaningar och möjligheter för utländska lärare som återinträder i yrkeslivet i svensk skola* [Challenges and possibilities for foreign teachers entering the profession in Swedish school]. Stockholm: Stockholm University. [[Google Scholar](#)]  find full text
4. Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. [[Google Scholar](#)]  find full text
5. Bourdieu, P. 1992. *Language & symbolic power*. Translated by Gino Raymond & Matthew Adamson. J. B. Thompson edited by Cambridge: Polity Press. [[Google Scholar](#)]  find full text
6. Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1996). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press. [[Google Scholar](#)]





7. Collins, J., & Reid, C. (2012). Immigrant teachers in Australia. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*, 4(2), 38–61.
[\[Google Scholar\]](#)  find full text
8. Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2011). Separate and flexible bilingualism in complementary schools: multiple language practices in interrelationship. *Journal Of Pragmatics*, 43. 11961208. doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2010.10.006
[\[Crossref\]](#), [\[Web of Science ®\]](#), [\[Google Scholar\]](#)  find full text
9. DeCuir-Gunby, J., Marshall, P., & McCulloch, A. (2011). Developing and using a codebook for the analysis of interview data: An example from a professional development research project. *Field Methods*, 23(2), 136–155.
[\[Crossref\]](#), [\[Web of Science ®\]](#), [\[Google Scholar\]](#)  find full text
10. Deters, P. (2011). *Identity, agency, and the acquisition of professional culture*. London, UK: A & C Black.
[\[Google Scholar\]](#)  find full text
11. Dewilde, J. (2013). *Ambulating teachers. A case study of bilingual teachers and teacher collaboration* (Dissertation). Faculty of Educational Sciences. University of Oslo.

12. Fee, J. F. (2010). Latino immigrant and guest bilingual teachers. Overcoming personal, professional and academic culture shock. *Urban Education*, 46(3), 390–407.
[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]  find full text
13. Georgi, V. B. (2016). Self-efficacy of teachers with migrant background in Germany: Handling linguistic and cultural diversity in school. In C. Schmidt & J. Schneider (Eds.), *Diversifying the teaching force in transnational contexts: Critical perspectives*, 78–79. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
[Crossref], [Google Scholar]  find full text
14. Goldstein, D. M. (2003). *Laughter out of place: Race, class, violence, and sexuality in a Rio shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [Google Scholar]  find full text
15. Janusch, S. (2014). Unheard voices: Stories of immigrant teachers in Alberta. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 1–17. Published online. [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]  find full text
16. Jönsson, A., & Rubinstein Reich, L. (2006). En yrkesidentitet i förändring? invandrade lärares möte med den svenska

skolan. *Pedagogisk Forskning I Sverige*, 11(2), 81–93.

[[Google Scholar](#)]  [find full text](#)

17. Karakasoglu, Y., & Dogmus, A. (2016). Muslimization - 'othering' experiences of students in academic teacher programs. In C. Schmidt & J. Schneider (Eds.), *Diversifying the teaching force in transnational contexts: Critical perspectives*, 62–70. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. [[Crossref](#)], [[Google Scholar](#)]  [find full text](#)
18. Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Methods, ethics, performance*. New York: SAGE. [[Google Scholar](#)]  [find full text](#)
19. Manik, S. (2014). South African migrant teachers' decision making; levels of influence and 'Relative Deprivation'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40(1), 151–165. [[Taylor & Francis Online](#)], [[Web of Science ®](#)], [[Google Scholar](#)]  [find full text](#)
20. Nohl, A.-M. (2010). Narrative Interview and Documentary Interpretation. In R. Bohnsack, N. Pfaff, & W. Weller (Eds.), *Qualitative analysis and documentary method in international educational research* (pp. 195–217). Opladen & Farmington Hills: Budrich. [[Google Scholar](#)]  [find full text](#)


21. Pollock, K. (2010). Marginalization and the occasional teacher workforce in Ontario: The case of internationally educated teachers (IETs). *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 100(1), 1–21. [\[Google Scholar\]](#)
 [find full text](#)
22. Ratkovic´, S., & Pietka-Nykaza, E. (2016). *Forced migration and education*. Refugee women teachers' trajectories in Canada and the UK. In C. Schmidt & J. Schneider (Eds.), *Diversifying the teaching force in transnational contexts. Critical perspectives*, 179–192. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
[\[Crossref\]](#), [\[Google Scholar\]](#)  [find full text](#)
23. Reid, C., & Collins, J. (2013). No-one ever asked me: The invisible experiences and contribution of Australian emigrant teachers. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(2), 268–290.
[\[Taylor & Francis Online\]](#), [\[Web of Science ®\]](#),
[\[Google Scholar\]](#)  [find full text](#)
24. Remennick, L. (2002). Survival of the fittest: Russian immigrant teachers speak about their professional adjustment in Israel. *International Migration*, 40, 99–121.
[\[Crossref\]](#), [\[Web of Science ®\]](#), [\[Google Scholar\]](#)  [find full text](#)
25. Rotter, C., & Timpe, M. (2016). Role models and confidants?

Students with and without migration backgrounds and their perception of teachers with migration backgrounds. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 59, 92–100.

[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]  find full text

26. Sandlund, M. (2010). *Lärare med utländsk bakgrund. Sju yrkeslivsberättelser om möten med nya skolsammanhang* [Teachers with a foreign background. Seven professional life stories about encounters with a new school context] (Dissertation). Linköping: Linköping University.

[Google Scholar]  find full text

27. SCB [Statistics Sweden, Forecast Institute]. (2017). *Trender och Prognoser 2017: Befolkningen, utbildningen, arbetsmarknaden med sikte på år 2035* [Labour market prospects until 2035]. Stockholm. [Google Scholar]  find full text




28. Schmidt, C., & Schneider, J. (Eds). (2016). *Diversifying the teaching force in transnational contexts. Critical perspectives*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]

 find full text

29. Walsh, S., Brigham, S., & Wang, Y. (2011). Internationally educated female teachers in the neoliberal context: Their labour market and teacher certification experiences in

Canada. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(3), 657–665.

[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]  find full text

30. Watt Boolsen, M. (2007). *Kvalitativa analyser. Forskningsprocess, människa, samhälle* [Qualitative analyses. Research process, individual, society]. Malmö: Gleerup.
[Google Scholar]  find full text
31. Wei, L. (2018). Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(1), 9–30.
[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]  find full text
32. Witzel, A., & Reiter, H. (2012). *The problem-centered interview*. London: SAGE Publications. [Crossref],
[Google Scholar]  find full text

Additional information

Author information

Catarina Economou

Catarina Economou, Doctor of Philosophy in Subject Matter Education. Senior lecturer of Swedish, Swedish as A Second Language with a Didactic Perspective at the Faculty of Education and Society, Department of Culture, Language and Media, Malmö University, Sweden



**Routledge
Experts On...
Education**

Free Resources
to help you
deliver effective
online learning

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group



Related articles

Education is my passport: experiences of institutional obstacles among immigrant youth in the Swedish upper secondary educational system

Jan Berggren et al., *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2020

Students' reasons for community language schooling: links to a heritage or capital for the future?

Janica Nordstrom, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2019

Emergent literacy instruction: 'continua of biliteracy' among newly immigrated adolescents

Anna Winlund, *Language and Education*, 2020

VET teachers between school and working life: boundary processes enabling continuing professional development

Per Andersson et al., *Journal of Education and Work*, 2019

School policies, biased teachers hamper immigrant children's learning

Phys.org, 2013

Knowledge of African-American language and culture benefits teachers in STEM fields

Phys.org, 2018

Medical Education in Radiology in Sweden

Theodore E. Keats et al., *Radiology*, 1965

New book offers integrated approach to teaching health and physical education in elementary schools

MedicalXpress

Powered by **TREND MD**

People also read

Article

Integrating Syrian refugee teachers into Swedish educational labour market – reflections on a fast track design >

Catarina Economou et al.

Education Inquiry
Volume 10, 2019 - Issue 4

Published online: 11 Mar 2019



Information for

[Authors](#)

[Editors](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Societies](#)

Open access

[Overview](#)

[Open journals](#)

[Open Select](#)

[Cogent OA](#)

Help and info

[Help & contact](#)

[Newsroom](#)

[Commercial services](#)

[All journals](#)

[Books](#)

[Keep up to date](#)

Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources by email



Sign me up



Copyright © 2020 Informa UK Limited

[Privacy policy](#)

[Cookies](#)

[Terms & conditions](#)

[Accessibility](#)

Registered in England & Wales No. 3099067

5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG