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Editorial

Adult Migrants' Language Learning, Labour Market, and Social Inclusion

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Abstract

In this thematic issue, we present up-to-date research from authors who problematise the various links between adult migrants' language learning, education, the labour market, and social inclusion. Some contributions are more focused on the relation between education and social inclusion, while others emphasise links between language learning, the labour market, and social inclusion. Together, authors in this thematic issue point to the multiple challenges migrants face when trying to establish themselves in a new country.

Keywords

adult education; adult learning; host countries; inclusion; labour market; migrants; second language learning; work

Issue

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1. Introduction

Language learning and language education play a central role in the establishment of adult migrants in a receiving country. Issues concerning language, learning, and the inclusion of migrants have gained increased political significance in the wake of globalization, particularly in recent years (Canagarajah, 2017). Whereas adult migrants' knowledge of the receiving country's official language is often treated as a prerequisite for social inclusion, the alleged lack of language competence among adult migrants is often considered a threat to social cohesion (Rydell, 2018a). However, the category of adult migrants is quite heterogeneous, including quite different life experiences and conditions for language learning and social inclusion (Abrahamsson & Bylund, 2012). From the perspective of migrants themselves, language learning appears mostly future-oriented, as access to linguistic resources is linked to a future identity of being part of an imagined community. It is thus regarded as a means for entering the labour market as well as higher education (Ahlgren, 2014; Norton, 2013; Rydell, 2018b). However, with a strong focus on language and language

learning, there is a risk that other factors of importance for migrants' social inclusion are neglected (Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2021; Simpson & Whiteside, 2015).

For adult migrants, adult education is a crucial setting for initial language learning (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2020, 2022). The main focus of initial language learning for adult migrants, as elaborated in national as well as international policies, is the preparation of these individuals for the labour market, i.e., employability (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2017; Simpson & Whiteside, 2015). However, the relationship between language learning and the labour market is complex. It has, for example, been shown how migrant adult students during their work placement encounter limited access to interaction and learning opportunities (Sandwall, 2013), or that knowledge in English, rather than the local language of the new host country, could be sufficient for career opportunities (Nelson, 2010). From a longitudinal perspective, it has been pointed out how those adult migrants that had participated in second language education after a period of 10 years experienced a higher level of labour market participation than those who never attended such education. Meanwhile, no significant differences

were found concerning levels of income (Kennerberg & Åslund, 2010). Nevertheless, other studies have illustrated that access to the labour market is not solely determined by migrants' language proficiency, since migrants' social mobility also depends on factors such as educational background and social networks (Behtoui & Olsson, 2014).

In sum, the relationship between migrants' language learning, the labour market, and social inclusion is a complex one. For this thematic issue, we invited contributions that problematise such relationships across different educational settings, labour markets, and geographical contexts.

2. Introducing the Contributions

Questions regarding the social inclusion of migrants often present education and the labour market as the main, or even sole, route to social inclusion. Migrants are most often construed as in need of language competence to get a job as quickly as possible, and thus become included in society. Nyström et al. (2023) provide a somewhat different take on the question. Although recognizing the importance of getting a job, they focus on contexts other than education and the labour market that are construed by migrants themselves as important on their path towards social inclusion in Sweden. These contexts are sports, internships, and civil society engagements. Likewise, Svensson (2023) also directs the analytical focus to migrants and their own experiences of social inclusion. She specifically compares the lived experiences of migrants in New Zealand and Sweden, illustrating how a range of exclusions intertwine and, in various ways, prevent a successful social inclusion in terms of language, social engagement, and labour market entry. Keeping the focus on migrants' own experiences of language learning and their establishment in the labour market, Cores-Bilbao and Camacho-Díaz (2023) turn to women who have migrated from China to Spain. They illustrate how, after a long period in Spain, these women wish to engage in language learning to widen their social networks but are met with mismatches between their training aspirations and the curricula of the courses available to them, which are solely focused on language learning. Jang (2023) also focuses on the experiences of migrant women and, specifically, follows one migrant worker in South Korea over five years, tracing her efforts in engaging in learning activities to enhance her social status and career prospects, as well as learn to better support herself and her children.

Turning back to comparative analyses, Pötzsch and Saksela-Bergholm (2023) provide an account of integration programs initiated in Finland and Canada. Drawing on interviews with staff, students, and employers engaged in such programs, they argue for a transformational approach to social inclusion with a focus on egalitarianism and the full exercise of critical agency among migrants in their respective countries of res-

idence. In their contribution, Söderlundh and Eklund Heinonen (2023) also direct their attention to two programs for language learning of migrants in Sweden: One of these targeted medical doctors with ambitions to gain accreditation to work as doctors; the other focused on unemployed migrants who, through the program, could work with maintenance of public areas. The authors illustrate how these programs construed migrants as lacking context-specific vocational knowledge, including a professionally related vocabulary. Turning to Austria, Zakariás and Al-Awami (2023) focus on a state-subsidized language program for adult migrants. They specifically turn attention to migrant language teachers from Central and Eastern Europe, illustrating how they are shaped as second-order teachers in migrant education in Austria. Turning to yet another group of migrants—migrants from Poland to Norway searching for labour—Golden and Opsahl (2023) analyse how two individual migrants react to current stereotypes of Polish migrants in the Norwegian labour market, and how a space might emerge to provide possibilities to contest stereotypes as well as to re-create professional expectancies.

In their contribution, Rydell et al. (2023) draw on narratives of four newly arrived students in Sweden, turning attention to how education intersects with migration policy. They illustrate how changes in education and migration policy form and, in various ways, direct migrants into specific professions and segments in the labour market. Such steering of migrants' educational and occupational choices is induced by power relations, an issue dealt with further in Zschomler's (2023) contribution. Zschomler turns to the lived experience of migrants engaged in language learning at a further education college in London. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, she illustrates a recurring, quite painful experience of "deskilling and delanguaging," and how it leaves an imprint on both migrants and teachers. However, to be a "good migrant" in relation to established norms doesn't seem to be enough. As Nordmark and Colliander (2023) illustrate when studying how adult migrants in Sweden are positioned in relation to education and the labour market, there is a need for a broader understanding of social inclusion. Such understanding needs to highlight the intersecting conditions for inclusion such as recognition, work opportunities, getting a residence, and being able to combine language learning with parenthood.

Bauer et al. (2023) also focus on notions of the "good migrant," or rather the "good citizen." By analysing civic orientation courses for migrants provided by the labour market agency in Sweden, they illustrate how migrants are construed as unknowing and in need of being fostered in order to be includable. Further, social inclusion is repeatedly understood as being conditioned not only by labour market participation but also by behaviour deemed correct in the workplace. Sweden is also the focus of Majlesi et al.'s (2023) contribution. They focus on how social inclusion is constituted through conversations taking place between migrants and volunteers at

language cafés organized by civil society organizations in Sweden. They illustrate how migrants emphasise belonging, rights, and access to resources for social participation as conditional to social inclusion, where the language cafés are conceived of as a possibility to develop the local community into an inclusive, equal, and integrated society. Finally, St John (2023) focuses on the role of multilingual assistance in the teaching and language learning of migrants in Sweden. Drawing on an action research project, the author explores how teachers were engaged in studying their own classroom teaching, laying the foundation for further development of how multilingual assistants could be used to enhance migrants' language learning.

3. Conclusions

Taken together, the 14 contributions to this issue not only provide valuable and important insights into the lives of migrants but also point to the importance of studying and problematising the links between language learning, education, the labour market, and social inclusion.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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