

Language teaching and language requirements for citizenship in Scandinavia

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Research group:

Language teaching and learning in multilingual contexts



Linguistic integration of adult migrants with poor education and the consequences of migration tests



- Funding from Norwegian Research Council (2021-2025)
- PI: prof. Edit Bugge, HVL
- (one of several) partner: University of Inland Norway

“[...] the primary objectives of the IMPECT project are to **investigate how migration tests impacts LESLLA learners’ integration and language learning** and to provide an improved research base for policy makers, language test developers and educational to improve pedagogical practices in adult education.”

<https://www.hvl.no/forsking/prosjekt/impect/>



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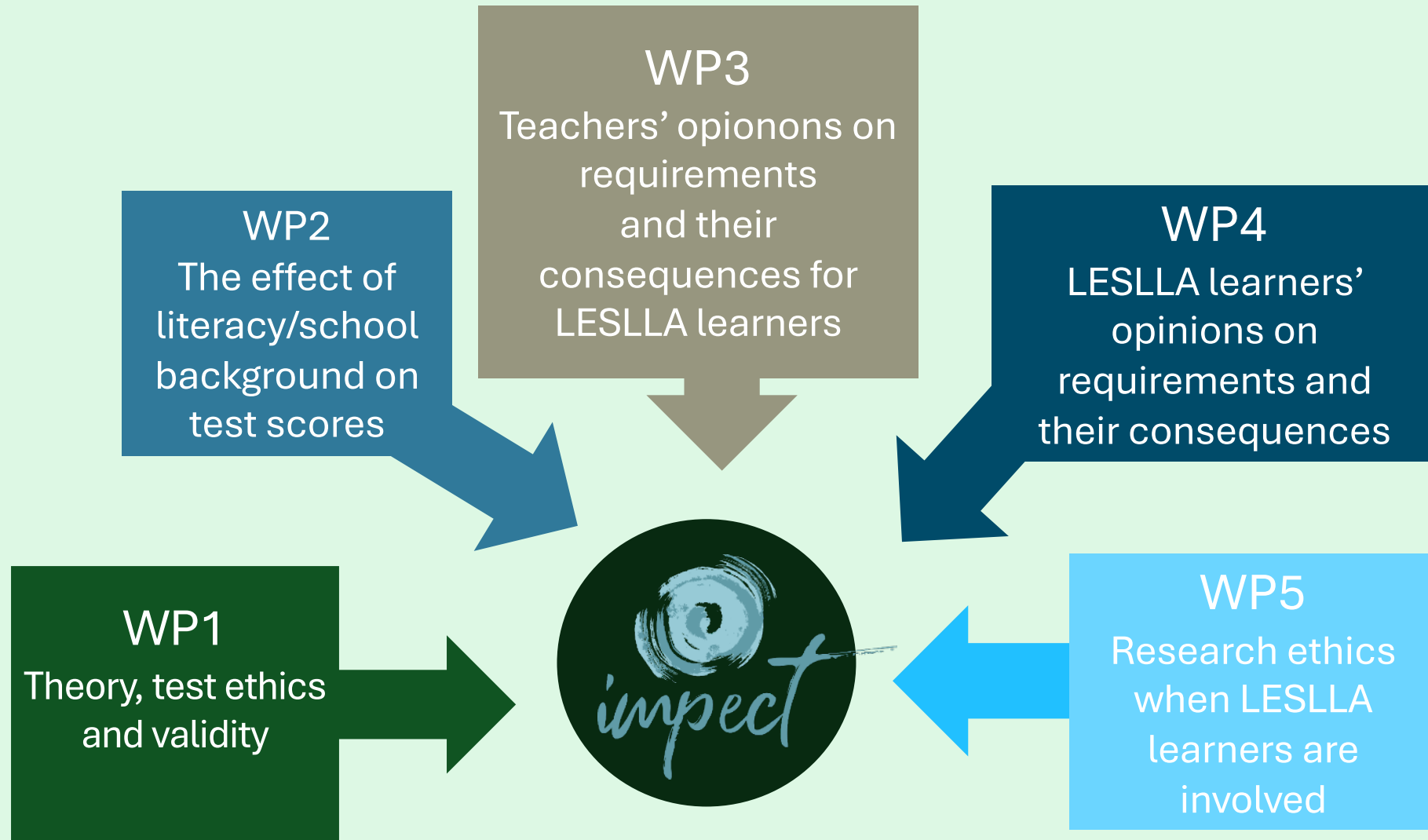


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RESEARCH FOCUS



DATA

A multi-methodological project:
Quantitative, qualitative and ethnographic methods

WP2
79 000+ test scores
(Norwegian language test A1-B2,
KoS- and citizenship test,
background data)

WP3
Electronic survey,
LESLLA
teachers, 15 countries
+ semi-structured
interviews with new and
experienced teachers in
8 countries (a.o. Norway, Denmark,
Sweden)



24 narrative
interviews
with Introduction program
language teachers in
Norway (N=12), Denmark (N=7)
and Sweden (N=5)

**WP4 Interviews with
LESLLA learners in
Norway
and Denmark (N=45)**
During and post
introduction program
completion



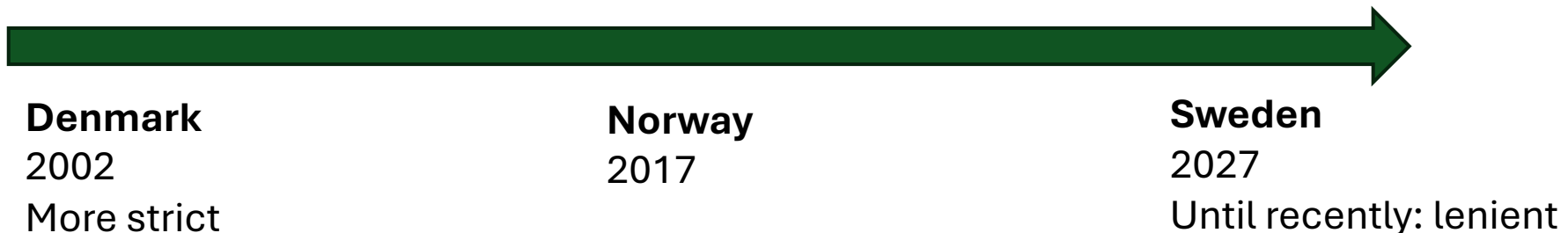
WP1
Literature,
prior research



WP5
Literature,
guidelines,
observations &
field notes

Language requirements in Scandinavia

- **Norway (2017):**
 - Citizenship: B1 oral proficiency + KoS or citizenship test in Norwegian
 - Permanent residency: A2 oral proficiency + KoS test in one of 29 languages
- **Denmark (2002):**
 - Citizenship: B2 in all four skills (PD 3) + citizenship test (Indfødtretsprøven)
 - Permanent residency: B1 in all four skills (PD 2)
- **Sweden (2027?):**
 - Language requirement «functional Swedish»
 - Citizenship and knowledge of society test



Language and civic requirements: Barrier or stepping stone?

- Forces migrants into a "life in the waiting room" (Fortier, 2021)
- Create hierarchies of 'deserving' og 'undeserving' (Monforte et al., 2018), 'failed' and non-citizens (Anderson, 2013); desirable og undesirable citizens (Fortier, 2017)
- Unequal distribution of anxiety and stress (Fortier, 2017)
- To become citizen requires resilience (Bassel et al., 2018)
- Risk of self-disqualification (Lexander et al., 2026; Nordanger & Bugge, 2025; Oers, 2013)



- 13 % test candidates with little or no schooling achieve B1 muntlig; 61 % of those with higher education (Bugge & Carlsen, 2025)
- 38 % test candidates with little or no schooling have more than one trial to achieve one of the KoS-tests; 7 % of those with higher education (Bugge & Carlsen, 2025)
- Cause of anxiety, frustration shame and despair (Nordanger & Bugge, 2025)
- Delayed integration trajectories and competing goals (Bugge et al. 2025)

Recently:

Findings from Norwegian Language Council (2025):

- 1 Near one out of five refugees with «right and duty» to attend Norwegian language training, does not participate. The numbers are similar for refugees (mainly from Ukraine) with only «right» to Norwegian language training.
- 2 A relatively large proportion of those attending Norwegian classes, do not achieve the B1 level.
- 3 There is a general lack of knowledge regarding language training and Proficiency in Norwegian in all migrant groups.

Språkrådet



Norskopplæring og norskferdigheter blant ulike innvandrergupper

Sweden: almost 50 % drop out from sfi (Swedish for immigrants) (Olsson, 2024)

Denmark: on average each participant spend time equivalent to one module in the Danish Education system (Kyvgaard, 2025)



So what for teachers?

- Highly politicized environment for language teaching (e.g. Bassel et al., 2018), where teachers are:
 - «caught in a bind between and are acutely aware of the stakes when assessing» (Fortier, 2021, s. 134)
 - in classrooms lacking of joy, but with increasing teacher disillusion (Fortier, 2018, Nordanger & Egeland, 2024)
 - «It's not as enjoyable and I know a lot of tutors are really stressed out in ESOL now» (Ali, in Fortier, 2017)
 - «They've got the vocab, they've got endless vocab, but not necessarily the grammar» (Fran, in Fortier, 2017)
 - Teachers perceive stricter requirements hinder integration, and; the stricter requirements, the more resistance among teachers (Bugge & Carlsen, 2025)
 - Teachers also report requirements cause emotional stress on both teachers and students (Carlsen et al., 2025; Nordanger, 2026).
- **Potential conflicts of agency, professional autonomy and (epistemic) trust?**

Turning point and resistance

(Nordanger & Egeland, 2024)

But at like lunchroom-level you sense anxiety, and you wonder.

It's difficult to imagine, when you know so little about them [planned tests] How the test will be designed and so on. But if it will be one single test for everybody, that we are expected to perform with the students, then it's going to be very hard to be part of that. Because that's like I would be exposing my own students to something they should not have to be exposed to. It's just like if you- yes, something that they would have to do without

being prepared for it. Then, I hope that I will keep doing what I believe in. (Erika, Sweden)

Well, it's a bit scary to be the one who's kind of supposed to [...] tick those boxes in that grid that- uh, certify competence on one level or another. And I have to say that when I first started, I didn't think that much about the fact that this was connected to uh residency and stuff like that. There has been a lot more attention on that over the last years, I think. (Lillian, Norway)

I think it's terrible that politicians are playing with those cards.

The whole thing gets worse. And takes away the joy

in the classroom.

That is, spontaneity, joy- joy over spending time together.

It's serious. Serious.

We don't laugh that much.

(Theodora, Denmark)

Resistance

Every week we talk about when is enough enough? Uh, when does it stop having a professional basis that I can defend and remain here? When does it stop making sense anymore? We keep talking about when is enough enough. And I can feel in myself that my own limits are pushed, because when I started doing this, I would never had accepted to be doing what I do today. But my limits are pushed all the time. So, I accept more and more. I don't know why I do that, but I do. (Lovise, Denmark)

After all, it's a Norwegian test that's supposed to certify a level. We are supposed to measure given criteria and decide. Perhaps a matter of vital importance for that student, that I don't know, but that's not up to me to judge, fortunately. Uh, I'm just supposed to say if it's passed or not passed- and then it's entirely clear and straight-forward, well, quite clear requirements- based on a few given criteria that we rehearse all the time and agree that "these are the criteria and this is what it means" So, we have to know what they mean, evidently. (Grete, Norway)

But I also participate in the screening of new students. Mm, uh: and I think it is (.) painful (.) to communicate the new rules [to the students] and especially to those who have eighteen months and are supposed to reach the B2 in eighteen months uh: it's like (.) [it's almost like we have to (.) apologize when we transmit the information 'sorry that the rules are so strict, but' and "it's almost impossible, but" @@ "this is what you have to do" (.) well, it feels just stupid. (Guro, experienced teacher, Norway) [Published in Lexander et al., 2026]

Conflicts and negotiations of epistemic trust?

(Egeland & Nordanger, in preparation)

“epistemic notions of trust”:

- refers to “*aspects of knowledge and knowledge production related to trust*” (Sundback, 2024, p. 1252).
- is imperative for learning, recognition and agency (Medina, 2020)
- Refugees generally have lower levels of trust in society (Gulliksen et al., 2024), and
- Many refugees experience mistrust in institutional encounters in the host country (Sundback, 2024)

Guardians, negotiators and mediators of trust?

But we prepare them very carefully for it [modul-tester] and that's also why I say that it [test preparation]

controls much of our teaching. So, we balance between teaching them- because after all, we have our professionalism, right? Between teaching them the Danish we know they will need, and what they need to pass their test. [It's a] delicate balance. (Theodora, Denmark)

And maybe I felt that particularly (.) and that I should be the one who says «but well, I'm sorry, but I know this is not interesting for you nor relevant for your plans for the future (.) but we have to do it» (Marianne, Norway)

Some [of the students] have unrealistic goals and plan to be lawyers and doctors and nurses (.) so we can keep saying that «yes, well, we know they cannot do that right» (.) but of course I don't tell them that» (Grete, Norway)

Take aways

[...] actually this is something I feel is not really my place to deal with (.) it's not – well I'm supposed to teach them Norwegian (.) that's it (Svein, Norway)

- However, language requirements and testing, «regimes of language testing», seem to affect language teachers in several ways:
 - There is a sense of loss of autonomy
 - Loss of sense of and capacity for agency
 - Level of restrictiveness, but also time (?) plays a role
 - For capacity for agency and negotiation of professional identities,
 - For the ways resistance is expressed, but not necessarily resistance in itself
 - Language teachers take on roles and responsibility as mediators, guardians and negotiators of (epistemic) truth
 - Trajectories and negotiations of trust involve both micro and macro-level «actors» and discourses

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