

Integration through adult and continuing education

By Bjarne Wahlgren and Tinne Geiger

National Centre of Competence Development, the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus

In the Nordic countries a large proportion of immigrants and descendants are excluded from the labour market and the group is overrepresented among the unemployed. International experience shows that adult education and training can be useful tools in providing immigrant groups a foothold in the labour market. To facilitate that process we need to know what factors motivate immigrants to participate in adult education and training and what the results and effects of different approaches are. In 2009 the National Centre of Competence Development conducted a comparative study in the Nordic countries, analysing the use of adult education and training targeted at the integration of immigrants into the labour market (employability)¹. This article outlines the findings and relates them to international experience.

Immigrants in the Nordic countries

The five Nordic countries differ in terms of the number of immigrant, their immigration history, and the composition of immigrant groups. Thus, the proportion of immigrants varies from 16 per cent of the population in Sweden, 11 per cent in Norway, 9 per cent in Denmark, 8 per cent in Iceland to just 2.5 per cent of the Finnish population². Iceland primarily experiences labour immigration, while the majority of the immigrants in Sweden are refugees. In the remaining three countries, the largest proportion of immigrants has immigrated on the basis of family reunification.

With an employment rate among immigrants at around 90 per cent in Iceland and around 50 per cent in Finland, there are great differences between the five countries. However, it is a common feature that employment rates are lower for immigrants than for the indigenous population in all the Nordic countries.

There are significant differences between the prerequisites for seeking and obtaining permanent residence permit and citizenship in the five countries. Sweden is the only country that does not have any demands concerning language skills, either in form of passed language tests or proof of language training. At the other extreme, Denmark requires, as a prerequisite for citizenship, that the final test in Danish³ be passed with the grade 4, and that a citizenship test be passed.

¹ The study was initiated and financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, and was conducted in collaboration with researchers from Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The reports are available on www.ncfk.dk.

² The comparison is made with the reservation that the assessment methods differ between the five countries. The methods are described in the respective national reports.

³ Danish 3 is equivalent to the level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

National integration strategies and initiatives

The five countries all emphasize employment in their integration strategies and efforts. In all the countries, employment and empowerment are regarded as key elements of successful integration. The five countries all consider language competences an essential prerequisite for employability and inclusion in society.

Denmark, Finland and Norway have integration laws. Denmark and Finland were among the first in Europe when they enacted integration laws in 1998 and 1999 respectively ⁴. In Norway the Introduction law was adopted in 2003⁵. Sweden and Iceland have no equivalent law but, similar to Denmark, Finland and Norway, they too have a centrally-defined integration strategy, focusing on employment and self-sufficiency as decisive factors of integration. Iceland differs from the other countries by having no corresponding focus on immigrants' employment, which is due to the fact that immigrants in Iceland first and foremost are labour immigrants (from outside the EU), who consequently have employment agreements in place before they enter the country.

Most of the national strategies and resolutions concerning integration efforts include an individual action plan as a central element. There are differences between the countries regarding the specificity of the action plans and whether there are penalties attached to not adhering to the plans. The differences range from Denmark's claim on an individual contract that specifies the objectives of the integration period, the road to achieving the targets and the penalties for non-compliance with the contract, to Iceland that, at the other extreme, have no statutory regulations for integration or introduction programmes.

In all the Nordic countries, the voluntary sector is involved in integration, both in relation to language teaching, and through their own integration efforts. In several of the Nordic countries, popular education plays a central role, especially regarding courses that connect language learning to social education.

Educational activities within the ordinary system of adult and continuing education

In all of the five Nordic countries, the educational activities for immigrants include both courses within the ordinary adult and continuing education system and courses specifically targeted at immigrants. In the next section, distinctions will be made between language teaching, general adult education at basic levels, and vocational education programmes targeted at adults. Examples of specific initiatives and projects showing good practice will be presented in the last section.

⁴ In Denmark: the Law on Integration of foreigners in Denmark, Law no. 474 of July 1st 1998, in Finland: the Law on facilitation of immigrants' integration and reception of asylum seekers, Law no. 493 of April 9th 1999.

⁵ Law on introduction arrangement and Norwegian training for newly-arrived immigrants, Law no. 80 of July 4th 2003.

Language teaching

Language teaching is a focal point of the immigrant integration process. In all the Nordic countries, the language courses correspond to the CEFR levels⁶, and the courses are divided into different tracks, levels and modules. The division of the language courses into levels and tracks helps to ensure that the participant groups are homogeneous in terms of linguistic competences. In Sweden and Iceland, the participants can be relatively heterogeneous; therefore it can be difficult to target the teaching. Thanks to a new module system, introduced by Sweden in 2003, class composition (based on prior educational achievement) is more uniform than before. Yet, participants' educational backgrounds can still vary considerably in both Sweden and Iceland.

The overall objectives of language teaching - to achieve sufficient language skills and knowledge of cultural and social conditions in order to engage effectively in society on an equal footing with other citizens - are very similar in the five countries. To achieve these objectives, the immigrants are taught basic language skills (basic reading, speaking, listening and writing skills), as well as cultural and social norms. The number of teaching hours varies greatly between the five countries. While immigrants in Denmark and Finland can receive almost 2000 hours of teaching, the figure in Norway is 300 hours and 240 in Iceland.

In terms of literacy education, Sweden is different from the other countries, as the course can be conducted in the immigrants' mother tongue. In the other Nordic countries, literacy education is carried out in the country's official language. However, to underscore the importance of the adopted country's cultural and community norms, the 'cultural and social content' can be taught (in all the Nordic countries) with the aid of interpreters.

Denmark is the only country with completely formalized requirements for teacher competences for teaching Danish as a second language. In Norway, teachers' competencies *should* include Norwegian as a second language or second migration pedagogy, while general teacher training is the only requirement in Sweden.

Finally, the five countries differ significantly in relation to the financing of language teaching. In Denmark and Norway, the state pays grants based on the number of students attending the courses and the number completing the courses. In the other countries, funding is not related to the number of participants in a similar way.

In Denmark, Finland and Sweden a relatively high proportion of immigrants are still unemployed after completing the language courses. In Denmark, about half of the immigrants are unemployed after language course completion, while about one third are unemployed three months following the Introduction Training

⁶ Common European Framework of Reference, that describes foreign- and second language competences. The framework spans from A1 (lowest) to C2 (highest).

in Finland and Norway. Evaluations from Denmark further suggest that the teaching of Danish as a second language does not provide sufficient language skills to continue into higher education. Finnish experience suggests that foreigners conducting a labour market-oriented education perform better than average.

General adult education at a basic level

In all the countries there are specific courses for bilingual students in connection with some of the general and preparatory adult education courses. In Denmark, the proportion of bilinguals attending relevant adult education has increased since the mid-1990s. In 2009, requirements for teacher competences in teaching Danish as a second language were introduced (qualification to teach Danish as a second language). In adult education centres, bilingual participants attend the same courses as Danish-speaking participants, something that both the centres and the students highlight in relation to integration.

Language teaching is commonly connected to general courses. In Denmark, Iceland and Norway, specific courses and initiatives targeted at immigrants within the general ordinary system have been developed in addition to the language courses.

Vocational education programmes aimed at adults

While immigrants in Norway and Sweden constitute a significant proportion of the total number of participants in labour market training (39 per cent in Norway, 34 per cent in Sweden), similar training is attended by a comparatively low number of immigrants in both Denmark and Finland. The initiatives within labour market training that are directed specifically towards immigrants combine language training with vocational education. That is the case in all the Nordic countries, all of which have experienced good results from combining language teaching and subject teaching: the interaction between the two seems to be mutually reinforcing.

Special initiatives

In Denmark, the central authorities devote significant economic resources to special initiatives for immigrants, unlike in Norway, Sweden and Iceland, where the integration effort focuses predominantly on language teaching and concomitant language training activities. All the Nordic countries have, however, implemented a large number of specially organized courses of adult and continuing education, either detached from, or in combination with, the ordinary education system. The courses have employability as their overall objective, but emphasize different factors in order to achieve this goal. The courses are carried out against different legal and funding backgrounds; they often combine educational elements from multiple contexts and they often involve co-operation between several agencies. A large number of courses are characterized as development work.

Special efforts required to increase employability

The study is based on descriptions of good practice in the sense that the described initiatives have had positive results in terms of the participants' permanent employability. In light of the initiatives, a number of lessons can be emphasized regarding co-operation between stakeholders, organization and pedagogy. The experience points to factors within the mentioned areas which may be conducive to success.

The experience suggest that significant results in terms of increased employability require special efforts; that specially organised courses are required, both within the ordinary system and in terms of special initiatives targeted specifically at immigrants. They also point to the fact that special efforts are resource demanding. For some projects, evaluations and descriptions are made to assess the success rate of the percentage of immigrants who have either found work or started a higher education course as a result of their participation in the project. For other projects, we can find detailed descriptions of invested resources. However, there is no data of sufficient quality to give a clear correlation between the greatest integration results and the resources invested.

Factors that may improve integration in the labour market

An assessment of the special initiatives will depend on the local and the national context: employment opportunities, participant group, and resources required to organise the initiative. It is against this background that decisions have to be made as to which initiatives and courses should be launched. Within these reservations, both Nordic and international experience point to a number of factors that may (in different contexts) improve and enhance integration with the labour market, if applied consistently and in the right way. There is thus empirical evidence for the following findings.

Responsibility

For the courses to be successful, it is crucial that authorities, companies, educational institutions and other stakeholders acknowledge their responsibility as key players. In Denmark, this responsibility is manifested at the political and strategic level through tripartite negotiations in which ministries, municipalities and social partners produce plans for the implementation of overall integration strategies. At all levels it is essential that the relevant actors work together in order to achieve the best possible outcome. This includes co-operation between public agencies and private companies, co-operation across authorities, and co-operation between language centres and voluntary organizations.

Coupling to the workplace

Studies across the Nordic countries show that the combination of language teaching and subject teaching, often further combined with mentoring and internship, give good results. When employment is the goal, a tight coupling to the workplace is an essential factor.

Clear goals

Courses with clear goals of specific competence acquisition for obtaining employment are those which have proved successful, as have educational courses that are coupled with an agreement for future employment on course completion.

Involvement

Involvement of the target population – immigrants – in both the planning and implementation of the initiatives – has a positive impact on efficiency. Organizing teaching strategies to suit the groups' competences and needs, as well as a focus on the groups' accessibility, are important factors for success. There is positive experience with using e-learning and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance a flexible organization, thereby enhancing accessibility. In addition, it is essential that the immigrants' wants and capabilities are matched with local job opportunities for the projects to contribute to integration with the labour market.

Mentoring

All the Nordic countries use mentoring and guidance arrangements in connection with employment and education. The arrangements emphasize the personal touch and human interaction. The plans consider integration to be a process in which the continuous monitoring of the mentoring role is important. Overall, there is positive experience of the use of mentors in relation to employment and education, but Swedish and Norwegian evaluations (in particular), indicate that mentoring is resource-intensive relative to efficiency, because there are very few mentees per mentor – often the relationship is one-to-one.

The Nordic experience in international perspective

International and comparative studies of good practice regarding the possible impact of adult education and training on the integration of immigrants with the labour market generally support the experience of the Nordic study.

Not surprisingly, several studies (e.g. OECD, 2007) conclude that labour market integration, among other things, is dependent on the state of the market, on factors such as the composition of the immigrant groups in terms of age, qualifications and reason for immigration, and on the policies related to integration. The OECD report also mentions adult and continuing education as an important factor in integration efforts.

In line with the policy in the Nordic countries, several studies highlight language skills as a basic prerequisite for (labour market) integration, and emphasize the importance of language training. Thus, figures from the U.S. (Heide, Chen, White & Soroui, 2009) suggest a correlation between language skills and employment among immigrants. The proportion of immigrants with good language skills (measured as literacy) outside the labour market was only half as high as that of immigrants whose language skills were below the basic

level. Two OECD reports (2006, 2007) point, similarly, to the importance of language training; the study from 2007 concludes that language competence is *the* main form of human capital in connection with the integration of immigrants (2007, p. 44-46).

The study also confirms the importance of work-related courses, while a study based on material from the OECD (Frimodt, 2009) recommends practice-oriented education and co-operation between technical schools and companies on competence development, including courses which combine linguistic and vocational elements. Two reports from the European Commission (Niessen, 2004, 2007) similarly point out that courses integrating language training, vocational education, and validation of existing competences are effective. The reports from the European Commission recommend that language teaching be organized in a way that makes it possible to combine the training with a job. This can be done by flexible organisation through distance learning, e-learning, or part time training.

Both the OECD studies (2006, 2007), the study by Frimodt (2009) and an English report (Torgerson, 2007) conclude, in line with the Nordic experience, that mentoring can have a positive effect on integration into the labour market and education, because, among other things, they can help to reduce drop-out rates.

The Nordic countries are increasingly using, albeit still relatively unsystematically, recognition of prior learning as part of the integration effort. The OECD report from 2007 notes that competences and work experience from the home country are often not recognized by employers, which has implications for both employment opportunities and the wage level (OECD, 2007, p. 49). Similarly, a study on the use of validation of prior learning in Canada and Sweden (Andersson, 2006) concludes that the system often acts as a barrier rather than as a way to include and use existing competences. While some forms of competences are accepted as valid, other immigrants' skills are often regarded as less valid or invalid. The reports from the OECD (2006) and Frimodt (2009) also point to the positive impact of recognition of prior learning.

Finally, the two OECD reports (2006, 2007) recommend that teaching is differentiated in relation to immigrants' skills and needs, and that it is organized on the basis of the needs of the (local) labour market. Again, the recommendations are in line with the experience of the Nordic countries.

Summary

The Nordic countries are very - and surprisingly - different in terms of immigration history, extent of immigration and the composition of immigrant groups. Integration initiatives differ similarly. There are, however, some common features and shared experience concerning how adult education and training can help enhance integration to the labour market.

Common to all the Nordic countries is their emphasis on employment and self-sufficiency in their integration strategies. All consider their official language to be a prerequisite for integration with the labour market and society, and all emphasize individual action plans in their national strategies for integration efforts. The focal point of integration in the five Nordic countries is language teaching.

In summary, the experience and evaluations of specific initiatives undertaken in the Nordic countries indicate that labour market integration can be most effectively achieved if the adult education and training programming has the following characteristics:

- Systematic co-operation among relevant actors;
- Tight coupling between the workforce's needs and the functional organization of education in relation thereto;
- Clear course goals in terms of employment opportunities and recruitment
- Combination of technical and language learning / teaching;
- Flexible organization of education in relation to participants' opportunities, such as use of e-learning and ICT;
- Personal support in the form of mentoring - the mentor should have knowledge of local labour conditions; and
- Clear identification of the target group and of the group's needs and conditions.

The international findings confirm the experience gained from the Nordic initiatives. In addition, systems to validate and recognise prior learning from the immigrants' homelands are generally insufficiently developed, both in the Nordic nations and internationally.

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