

**Integration of newly arrived students in primary and secondary
education in the Netherlands:
The challenges that teachers face and their strategies to overcome
them**

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Date: 21-06-2021

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Abstract

The integration of newly arrived migrant students (NAMS) in a new educational system has become commonplace in the education literature. Teachers are the agents of inclusive practices to the changing demographic of schooling. Yet, little is known about their struggles when teaching NAMS. This study investigates the challenges that teachers face when it comes to the integration of refugee and migrant children in the Dutch educational system, as NAMS constitute a significant portion of the student community. At first, the Dutch education system is shortly described and an overview of the NAMS' programs is displayed. Furthermore, theories of multicultural and intercultural approaches in regard to inclusive education highlight the importance of teachers' agency and self-efficacy in multiethnic classrooms. For the research, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers from the varied level of newcomers' education. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, using inductive and deductive coding to identify patterns and themes. The findings suggest that teachers face demanding classroom circumstances, in many cases, there is not enough professional support and the extent of training and education for the teachers is insufficient. As a result, an organized policy towards NAMS education is essential, ensuring additional support and specialized training for teachers.

Keywords: *newcomers, refugee and migrant children, education, teachers, challenges*

Samenvatting

De integratie van 'nieuw aangekomen migrantstudenten' (NAMS) in het nieuwe onderwijssysteem is een veelbesproken onderwerp in de onderwijsliteratuur. Leraren zijn de bemiddelaren van inclusieve praktijken voor de veranderende demografie van het onderwijs. Toch is er weinig bekend over de moeilijkheden die komen kijken bij het lesgeven aan NAMS. Deze studie onderzoekt de uitdagingen waar leraren mee te maken hebben als het gaat om de integratie van vluchtelingen- en migrantenkinderen in het Nederlandse onderwijssysteem, aangezien NAMS een aanzienlijk deel van de studentengemeenschap vormen. Allereerst wordt het Nederlandse onderwijssysteem beschreven en wordt een overzicht getoond van de verschillende NAMS-opleidingen. Daarnaast wordt het belang van de keuzevrijheid en zelfeffectiviteit van leraren in multi-etnische klaslokalen besproken. Dit wordt gedaan vanuit theorieën welke een multiculturele en interculturele benadering met betrekking tot inclusief onderwijs benadrukken. In dit onderzoek zijn semigestructureerde interviews gehouden met negen docenten van verschillende niveaus binnen het NAMS-onderwijs. Er is gebruik gemaakt van een thematische analyse om de gegevens te analyseren,

met behulp van inductieve en deductieve codering om patronen en thema's te identificeren. De bevindingen suggereren dat leraren te maken hebben met veeleisende klasomstandigheden. In veel gevallen lijkt er onvoldoende professionele ondersteuning te zijn en is de mate waarin leraren getraind en opgeleid worden onvoldoende. Daarom is een georganiseerd beleid, dat zorgt voor extra ondersteuning en gespecialiseerde opleiding van leraren, ten aanzien van NAMS-onderwijs essentieel.

Sleutelwoorden: *nieuwkomers, vluchtelingen- en migrantenkinderen, onderwijs, leraren, uitdagingen*

Introduction

The refugee crisis is a controversial phenomenon around the world and in Europe in particular, which in the past couple of years has witnessed a large influx of refugees due to war and political tension in various parts of the world. Since the peak of inflows in 2015, numerous countries are engrossed with the question of integrating these new populations into the wider society. In addition, recent social and political developments such as European Union expansion have led to changes in patterns of migration within Europe (EC, 2019). Among the populations there are thousands of families with pre-school or school-age children. Children have a particularly important position, as they are a great source of economic potential and play a significant part in creating a rich cultural mosaic. Also, the future success of these countries and their competency to develop into inclusive and reflective societies is eventually defined by their youth. Hence, the host-countries have the responsibility to create an educational system in order to integrate these children and young people into their new society. Human Rights Watch (HRM, 2015) emphasized the importance of education in determining the future of young refugees and migrants and its potential to transform lives for those who have access to it.

Although all children's fundamental right to basic education is recognized under international and regional human rights law, including EU law (EU, 2016), in practice the type, quality and duration of schooling offered to asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children depends more on where they are in the migrant/asylum process than on their educational needs (UNCHR, UNICEF & IOM, 2019). Long experience with migration and integration issues makes the Dutch case an interesting one to study in-depth.

The Dutch Educational System and Newcomers

In the Netherlands, all young people up to 18 must attend school until they obtain a basic qualification of HAVO, VWO or MBO level 2 certificate (OWC, 2016). Below, figure 1 provides an overview of the levels in the Dutch educational system.

The school governing bodies and the municipalities are responsible for organizing the education for newly arrived migrant students (NAMS). As a result, there are various educational programs for the newcomers as is also the case in other European countries (EU report, 2013:54). There might be advantages to this type of decentralized structure as the in- and outflow of newcomers is unpredictable and decentralized organization provides flexibility and the capacity to adapt to changes and fluctuations.

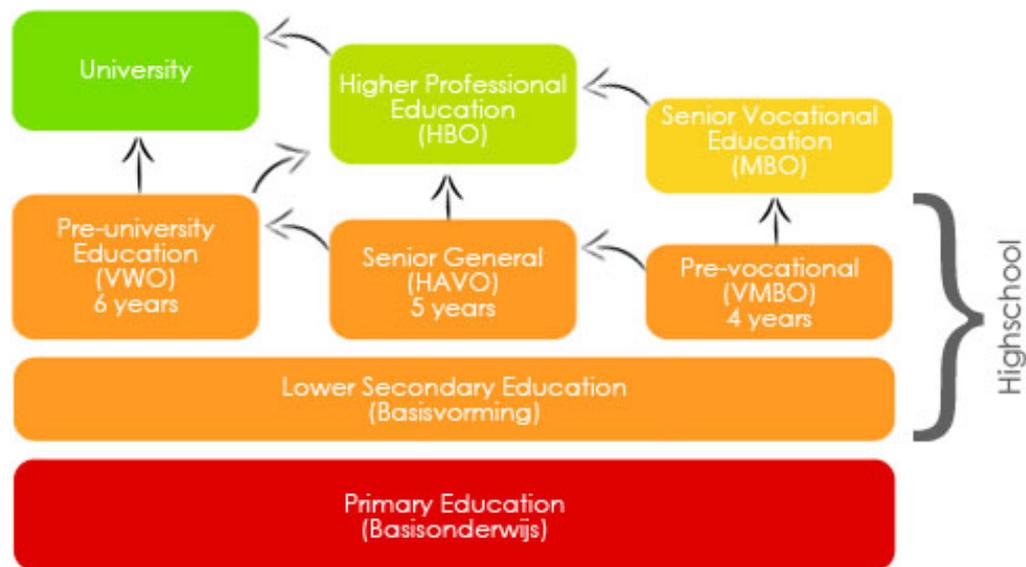


Figure 1. Educational system in the Netherlands

However, this type of structure can also cause difficulties in the further integration of NAMS into society, as decentralization may provoke the progress of resource-rich areas, but at the same time, repress the poor ones if control by the top is not well managed (Nurakhir, 2016).

A primary education teacher training degree (PABO) is required to become a primary school teacher in the Netherlands. This degree is also needed to teach in dedicated classes for newcomers in primary education. Recently, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OWC) has decided that teachers with PABO degree are allowed to teach at International Transition Classes (ISKs) when they have received a certificate for Teaching Dutch as a Second Language or when they have two years working with this certificate- NT2 (Bussemark and Dekker, 2016). These teachers are considered to have the necessary pedagogical and didactical skills that match the needs of the newcomers. Similar requirements are needed when a teacher is working in the secondary education (Le Pichon & Baauw, 2019). Currently, there are no national laws or guidelines on how to acquire additional teaching skills for teachers of newly arrived students with a different native language (Vijfeijken & Schilt-Mol, 2012).

Structure of classes for Newcomers in Primary and Secondary Education

In order to achieve higher integration into primary and secondary schools for newcomers' introductory classes (ISKs) have been formed. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) defines newcomers as students without the Dutch nationality who have arrived in the Netherlands less than a year ago (Tudjman et. al., 2016).

These classes are the main instrument that has been introduced to meet the needs of children whose language proficiency is not sufficient for attending a regular school. Also, they typically contain children of different ages and they are smaller than regular school classes, because the children need a lot of individual attention. Every child is assessed at the moment of application.

The various differences among the language schools and classes for newcomers creates a complicated image about the existing policy and structure of the general education for newly arrived students in the Netherlands. Currently, the Netherlands have around 350 primary schools and 120 secondary schools with classes for newcomers as is stated by LOWAN, an education aid organization that supports schools that provide initial reception education to newcomers, in both primary and secondary education (Tudjman et. al., 2016). LOWAN assists schools and teachers through providing information, advice and training in courses (Ingleby et al., 2013).

While these classes with newcomers are regional, others are centered around a district, village or town (Le Pichon & Baauw, 201). The students will remain in these classes until their Dutch language skills are sufficient enough to attend a (regular) school in their district. Most classes for the newly arrived students are part of mainstream school and are either located in the same building as the mainstream school or have their own building. Moreover, every asylum seeker's center works together with a school and in some cases, the schools are to be found in the center for asylum seekers, as is the case in the cities of Leersum, Katwijk and Dronten.

Preparatory classes are considered to provide more time and space for the teaching and learning procedure of the language than the mainstream classes (EACEA, 2019). In secondary education in particular where students are older and need more time to learn a new language, these classes play a significant role (Koehler, 2017). Nevertheless, preparatory classes can also delay the integration of migrant and refugee students by separating them from their native peers (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016).

Dutch educational policy for newcomers has undergone a process of development stretching back over decades (Ingleby et. al., 2013). Whereas in the past education in the child's own language was valued as an approach, the main emphasis at the present is on learning to speak Dutch. However, the segregation of refugee and migrant children, both in schools and in neighborhoods, is an issue that continues to concern (Ingleby et al., 2013);

The project EDINA (Education of International Newly Arrived migrant pupils) brings together policy makers, schools and researchers from Finland (Helsinki), Belgium (Ghent) and the Netherlands (Rotterdam and Utrecht). The main objective of EDINA is to provide support to municipalities, schools and teachers in the reception and the integration of NAMS into the school system. Three researchers from Utrecht University and Principal Investigators of the EDINA

network, Pichon, Baauw and van Erning, have written a country report on the Netherlands (Le Pichon & Baauw, 2019). In this report it is pointed out that the composition of the student population in Dutch schools have extremely changed in the last couple of years. This results not only from diversified countries of origin and motives for migration, but also from the fact that the social background of migrants and complex factors such as their traumatic experiences, have most likely changed. In addition, the NAMS make more transitions in the Netherlands than other students do, as they have to make an extra transition from the class for newcomers to the mainstream school. All these aspects suggest that the population of newcomers, even after their arrival in the country, is very dynamic on various levels. Finally, this report demonstrates that there are still no explicit requirements to teach a class for newcomers, despite the fact that these requirements are desirable since the population of NAMS is complex and demands more competences than teaching a mainstream class (Le Pichon & Baauw, 2019).

The degree of professionalism among the teachers who are working in an introductory school or class is high (Ingleby et. al., 2013); researchers and educational innovators have long been active in this field. In addition, teachers in their majority are trained in the NT2 curriculum (Dutch as a Second Language), but this does not apply for all the teachers, especially in the mainstream schools, where non-Dutch students compose the minority. As a result, forms of intercultural education have been developed primarily in schools with an ethnically mixed pupil population (Leeman & Ledoux, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The role of schools and teachers in promoting NAMS' integration

As education is a human right, to ensure an individual's right to education it is not only necessary to make school education compulsory, but also to respect student's personal needs and cultural characteristics (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). When it comes to promote cross-cultural education, common attitudes among students in line with the model of "universal good citizenship" (Banks, 2012), a multicultural approach is proposed. This approach focuses on differences and similarities between cultures and aims to accept and respect diversities. However, this concept has received criticism, mostly because its lack of recognition of role of cultural background to individual experience (Portera, 2010). Thus, a new approach has been developed, the intercultural approach, which is characterized by constructive exchanges between people from different cultural groups, based on the recognition and acceptance of cultural differences to enhance mutual understanding and collaboration.

The role of multilingualism in a plural society, the need to promote the coexistence of different religious groups in school and society, the integration of migrant children in school and encouraging successful learning experiences for these students were the new issues that have been introduced to the framework of intercultural education (Allemann-Ghionda, 2009). Schools have to become the tool to introduce students to different cultural backgrounds and to start building an intercultural society in which differences are accepted and respected (Berry, 2005).

As a result, schools and teachers play a critical role in helping NAMS find some sense of safety and helping them maximize their learning potential. In order to create an environment for active learning and socialization, the government, school administration and teachers are required to have active participation in the process and partner together. Although, the collaboration of the aforementioned is significant, literature suggests that one method in providing support to refugee students is focus on teacher agency (Rose, 2019). Teacher agency is defined as teachers' power to successfully use actions that frame their practice and workplace (Biesta et al., 2015, 2017). Also, it is argued that teacher agency facilitates student learning, professional development, collaborative teacher learning and school development (Toom et al., 2015). However, despite the importance of the role of teacher agency in supporting students from a refugee background, this aspect is currently understudied and in need of investigation (Rose, 2019).

Working towards coexistence and integration should not be a matter of teachers' goodwill and intuitions but should be based on specific skills and competences. To sustain continual professional development, training experiences need to be framed by theoretical and methodological approaches that can support teachers in multi-ethnic classrooms. That requires teachers' intercultural skills to be promoted during initial teacher education periods. However, intercultural education is not given the attention needed (Homan, 1999).

The teachers in the Netherlands: challenges, self-efficacy and training

Some of the challenges that teachers face in their classroom with migrant and refugee children include the assessment of the students' previous knowledge, the learning activities as well as the promotion and support of cognitive, emotional and linguistic achievements of the students (Biasutti et al., 2020). Educational material adds up to their challenge to respond to the needs of the students. Specifically, a digital, communicative and task-oriented method (DISK) of Dutch for non-Dutch speaking students in international transition classes has been developed for ages from 10 to 18, but its suitability for all groups and particularly for illiterate children is questioned (Tudjman et al., 2016).

Self-efficacy also affects the way that teachers can address disruptive and challenging behavior in the classroom (Lambert et al., 2009). Teaching students with behavioral problems can be

hard and can create uncertainty among teachers, as the aforementioned need to understand this behavior and the reasons causing it. Although, teachers' self-efficacy has been studied over the last years, not much attention has been given to teachers' self-efficacy in multiethnic classrooms. A study by Geerling, Thijs and Verkuyten (2018) showed that Dutch teachers tend to experience less self-efficacy with ethnic minority students.

Teachers' awareness of refugee education policy and practice also appears limited, partly due to the absence of a clear and consistent approach to refugee education and policy (Matthews 2008). Although professional learning is available for schools and classroom teachers, the number of teachers enrolling in courses specific for refugee students is limited.

Given the results of a study by Tudjman and van den Heerik (2016), it is not clear yet what it takes for the teachers to teach for diversity in the Netherlands. This study came to the conclusion that there are studies on teaching diverse regular classes, but not classes especially aimed for NAMS. Moreover, a lot of competences are demanded from the teachers, but most of them do not have any experience at all working with NAMS.

NAMS: refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking children

While asylum-seeking children most of the times live in an asylum-seeker center until they obtain permit for permanent residence, their living situation after that is similar to the children of migrant origin: they usually live in the same neighborhoods and go to the same schools. Moreover, no distinction is made between them administratively, and they are entitled for the same programs (Ingleby et. 2013). Numerous programs which benefit minority children are not specifically targeted at ethnic or migrant groups, but at children with "special needs" or "social disadvantage" (Ingleby et. al., 2013). In a great extent, they deal with discrimination and racism because of their race, ethnicity religion or cultural differences (McBrien, 2005). Also, migrant and refugee teenagers might also experience an identity crisis as they try to meet the cultural demands of their families and peers (McBrien, 2005).

Although the data report significant similarities between refugee and migrant children when it comes to integration and educational policies, some studies have proven that refugee children deal with some extra obstacles (Bloch et al., 2015). Except from adjusting to a new country, refugee children often had disrupted or minimal prior education, insecure housing and poverty (Block et al., 2014). Finally, refugee children are more likely to have mental issues affected by trauma or pain due to their forced migration and their distressing experiences, which can impact their personal development (Essomba, 2017). As a result, they need an education with a strong emotional and affective component.

The present research

Supporting the integration of NAMS with a long-term vision, and identifying and meeting these children's needs, will not only benefit the students themselves, but also pave the way for the Netherlands to become a truly multicultural and inclusive society. Therefore, the main research question of my thesis focuses on the role of the teachers in this process: *what kind of challenges the teachers face during the integration of newly arrived refugee children in primary education in the Netherlands, and what kind of strategies teachers choose to overcome them.* As it is pointed out above, teachers play an essential role in the integration of NAMS in the Dutch education system.

Moreover, the lack of in-depth research to their contribution to an intercultural education makes this study quite relevant and interesting (Rose, 2019). In addition, both refugee and migrant children are chosen to represent the students' population because of the many similarities these minorities share. The sub-questions that were formulated in order to support further the main research questions and provide a better idea of the current situation in the school context are: *What are the experiences of the teachers when it comes to refugee education? How can teachers help refugee students? Is any support provided to them?* These questions aim to create a more concrete idea of what teachers are dealing with in their everyday interaction with refugee and migrant children, including teaching and learning and additional support.

Method

Type of research and measuring instrument

This study is a qualitative research. This type of research focuses in understanding a research question as a humanistic or idealistic approach (Pathak et. al., 2013). The reason I choose this type of research is because qualitative research permits the participants to share their experiences and gives them voice in the study (Gibson et al., 2004), which was essential for my research objective. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most suitable method to obtain more suitable results. As Hijmans and Kuyper (2007) suggest qualitative interviews are "*an exchange with an informal character, a conversation with a goal*". As a result, interviews are used to obtain insights into a person's subjective experiences, opinions and motivations (Hak, 2007). In this study, the qualitative semi-structured interviews added the interactive component and allowed for various topics to emerge. Finally, although interviews might display a few limitations, such as securing access, making sensitive records and managing communication (Price, 2002), they also provide the researcher with the opportunity to respond to individual differences and situational circumstances (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013).

Participants

The qualitative research does not demand pre-determined sample sizes (Phillipsen & Vernooij-Dassen, 2007). The quality of the data is more essential than the number of the participants (Tuckett, 2004). A common range is usually from 8 to 15 participants, but it can vary widely both inside and out of this range depending on the design of the research (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). The sampling of my research was based on two types of sampling: purposive and snowball. The first strategy was preferred because the research question called for respondents with specific experience and knowledge. Secondly, snowball sampling played an assisting role in reaching more respondents with relevant profile. Snowball, also known as “chain referral” or “networking”, happens when the researcher starts collecting information from a few people and then these people put the research in touch with others who may be acquaintances or colleagues (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013).

Based on the above mentioned, the selected sample is Dutch teachers that are working with NAMS in primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands. I interviewed nine teachers from different stages of refugee and migrant education. In the following table (Table 1), the demographic characteristics of the participants are included.

<i>Participants¹</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Level of NAMS education</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>
<i>Hilary</i>	Female	45+	Primary ISK	6-8 years
<i>Sandra</i>	Female	30-45	Primary ISK	11+years
<i>Todd</i>	Male	30-45	Primary Regular school	0-2 years
<i>Vivian</i>	Female	45+	Primary ISK	3-5 years
<i>Linda</i>	Female	30-45	Primary School in refugee camp	3-5 years
<i>Martha</i>	Female	45+	Secondary ISK	3-5 years
<i>Gerald</i>	Male	30-45	Secondary ISK	11+ years
<i>Harriet</i>	Female	30-45	Primary ISK	6-8 years
<i>Miriam</i>	Female	45+	Primary ISK	9-10 years

¹The names given are pseudonyms and not the actual names of the participants

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Procedure and ethical conduct of the research

The interviews were conducted online due to coronavirus regulations and the average length of an interview was forty-five minutes. In order to ensure anonymity, respondent's personal information is not mentioned in the result section of this study. In addition, the participants were informed of the purpose of the research through an information letter that was sent to them via email, and their written consent was asked not only for their participation in the research but also for the recording of the interviews. Since all respondents agreed to the audio-recording, all interviews were recorded in order to transcribe them with accuracy.

Data analysis

The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed using the qualitative method of thematic analysis. This method allows the researcher to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Thematic analysis can be used in both large or small data and can produce data-driven and theory driven analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Specifically, the method of analysis chosen for this study was a hybrid approach of qualitative methods of thematic analysis which included both the inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998) and the deductive, a template of codes created before the interviews (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

This coding approach contained the identification of an important code prior to a process of explanation (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes can be identified and developed by encoding the organized information of the data (Fereday, 2006). Boyatzis defined a theme as “ a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (p. 161). In addition to the inductive approach, I used preexisting coding list based on the literature. When using this list, a researcher creates codes before the start of an in-depth analysis of the data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). In the following table (Table 2) the main codes and subcodes are visible, with a distinction between inductive and deductive.

<i>Main Codes</i>	Challenges	Strategies	Support for teachers	Suggestions
Inductive	Educational Background	Teaching Methods	Consulting	Funds
	Language Barrier		Resources	Professional support
			Training	Training and education
Deductive	Limited time	Focus on students		Common strategy

Behavioral problems			Educational approach
			Policy

Table 2. Coding List: Main Codes and Subcodes

I used the software NVivo to analyze the interview transcripts. A complete process of data coding and recognition of themes was undertaken. The reason I choose this program is because NVivo allows users to classify, sort and arrange information; examine relationships in the data; and combine analysis with linking, shaping, searching and modeling.

Results

After analyzing the interviews, some patterns emerged in the teachers' answers. For example, it was identified that the most frequent challenges the teachers faced were with regarded to the educational level of the students and their behavior in the classroom. Moreover, to a great extent, the respondents commented on the lack of training and education when it comes to refugee and migrant education, either regarding teaching methods or dealing with more sensitive issues that emerge from the behavior of the students. Finally, regarding their suggestions, most of them follow the same pattern and mention identical or similar proposals, such as quality education and training or more funds to support schools with NAMS.

Challenges

Educational Background

The level of previous education seems to concern teachers that work with newcomers. In particular, Linda mentioned: *“There are students who went to good schools and have a good knowledge of Mathematics for example, or good reading skills in their own language”*. These students tend to understand better and faster the rules of the new language, compared to non-native students with poor previous educational background. Therefore, teachers sometimes feel that they cannot support them sufficiently in order to improve their academic performance. For refugee students who often have bigger interrupts of their studies, it is quite difficult to adapt to the new school system and school materials. As, Miriam, a primary teacher, stated *“some of them haven’t gone to school for a couple of years, so they don’t even know how to start with an assignment”*; thus, teachers sometimes struggle to meet their needs, and at the same time prepare them for the demands of Dutch mainstream education.

Language Barrier

Almost all the respondents commented on the fact that the main challenge when teaching non-Dutch students is the different language. Not only it is difficult to communicate with the students but also each language has its own structure. As result, some students who are used to a different way of thinking when it comes to linguistic competence tend to understand quicker and easier the logic of the new language than others. For example, based on an experienced teacher's comments, "*for migrant children from Japan, it's more difficult than the ones from England*". Therefore, teachers often feel unprepared to meet the various needs of the students in the classroom, and find it demanding to choose what kind of education approach is needed to help them find connections between their native and Dutch language.

Limited Time

Inside the classroom, both teachers and students have to deal with time. Limited time was also identified as a challenge, especially for teachers who don't have the time to focus on the students as much as they would like, but also for the students that need more time to understand the given instructions due to the language gap. A secondary male teacher working in an introductory class said that "*the students need more time with our kind of education. Everything is new to them*". This reflects more to the time that students spend in the ISKs and not to the teachers.

The following comment represents the challenge of time from the part of the teachers. An *Intern Begeleider* (an internal supervisor) from a regular school stated that "*There is no time to focus on these students in a regular school when you have 23-27 children who learn in a different way.*" ISKs teachers feel that they need more time to prepare properly the students for their transition in mainstream education and at the same time, teachers in regular schools, struggle with offering non-native students the attention they deserve.

Behavioral problems

As school is one of the main environments that a child is interacting with other people on everyday basis, teachers seem to observe and experience deviance from children that have lived traumatic experiences. Refugee children, more than migrant, in numerous cases have fled their home countries with their families to avoid persecution, war and/or civic conflicts. The majority of the teachers are referring to the students' behavior as a factor that influences the teaching process and the way students are behaving in the classroom. Martha, who works only with refugee and migrant children, described:

“You know that the behavior they have they don't do it because they want to bother you. Sometimes they're aggressive with their body or with the language. They can't help this behavior, sometimes it's about their past trauma.”

In secondary education some teachers describe more intense situations. For example, Gerald said that: *“Sometimes they get into fights, in and out of the classroom. They are overwhelmed from their past and they release their anger. What should you do in situations like that?”*. Moreover, Martha commented: *“They don't know how to start the day in the classroom, they get angry or sad or sleep in the class. So, it's quite a challenge to deal with this kind of behavior.”*. All these statements support that students' behavior concerns the teachers and they are trying to find an effective way to address difficult situations.

Strategies

Teaching methods

Teaching a foreign language does not only require the basic knowledge about common teaching methods and practices. The teacher should be familiarized and trained to use specific methods in order to overcome the linguistic barrier and eventually teach students new letters, words and expressions. During the interviews, the teachers explained that some follow more abstract methods, which are not based in a given guideline, rather than experience. They focus on each child's individual needs and they assess which method they should choose for their teaching practices. Nonetheless, there were those who described a particular procedure that they follow in teaching the vocabulary and the sounds of the words. Examples from both situations are cited below:

Todd: *“When a teacher is teaching and they (students) cannot participate in the lesson because the level is too high, they can work on their own work out of a specific folder”*

Vivian, described a method consisted by 12 parts, in which they teach the students the letters and the sounds of small words with the help of pictures: *“We have pictures or an object from that word or we teach them with the songs, so we do that with every word and there's also a book we use to learn the words.”*

Focus on the students

Except from the existing teaching methods that schools and teachers use to make the teaching and learning process, sometimes they focus on the students individually and they don't always follow specific teaching methods. Miriam a teacher in a transition secondary school in Utrecht: *“I always given them personal attention. I see what the student needs and take him/her with me step-by-*

step to help them adapt". Also, Gerald said that *"The teachers must give attention to every student separately and not always follow the guidelines for the teaching methods"*. Teachers have realized that personal attention leads to better communication and understanding; thus, they are able to support student' emotional and linguistic achievements more affectively,

Support for Teachers

Consulting

In order to overcome the challenges they face in their everyday interaction with refugee and migrant families, the teachers reported that they often contact professionals. These either come from their school environment or are affiliated with external organizations. Teaching these students is not only about implementing the right methods inside the classroom. It is also related to the communication and bond the teacher will create with the parents. For that reason, it is essential for both parties, to be able to communicate properly even if they don't speak the same language. Therefore, parental involvement seems to also affect the integration of these children in their new schools. A young female teacher that works in a primary school with only refugee children, stated the following: *"If we need extra support for a child, we can contact Sensazong, an individual organization that has all kinds of support for the family or for a child and also in their own language"*.

Teachers need consulting and support regarding the teaching methods and tactics there are going to use in their classrooms, too. Todd, who works as an Intern Begeleider in a regular primary school mentioned that: *"It's my responsibility to know when the teachers need support. So first they come to me and we can talk about the thing that they are struggling with."* He also stated that they can ask additional help from experienced schools in NAMS education. Consulting in means of advice or proper communication, is consider quite significant and although numerous teachers mentioned that they get supported, they also pointed out that organized actions would be more beneficial and effective.

Resources

Resources are an important part in all levels of education, especially when it comes to more sensitive groups like refugee and migrant children. Teachers must be always prepared and be able to access resources like teaching materials, books and information. All the participants, without exception, mentioned as their main source LOWAN. For instance, Vivian who work only with refugee and migrant children remarked the following: *"I think LOWAN is the most important network and the most important source of information for teachers working with this population"*.

Expect LOWAN, teachers also have access to online material or books, offered by their school or other organizations, but accessing resources is basically an individual effort.

Training

Training and additional education is quite beneficial for the improvement of refugee and migrant education as teachers learn what's new in this field from methods, approaches to materials such as books. The participants also highlighted this particular kind of support and mentioned some examples of current efforts in educating the teachers that work with refugee and migrant students.

Sandra exemplified that "*LOWAN is also an organization that provides training and workshops for all teachers around the country*". Another female primary teacher also mentioned that LOWAN organizes workshops with extra information. Todd stated that "*Some teachers in our community with experience in refugee and migrant education provide workshops for the teachers*". Also, Vivian described a project of her school, called Itk Maatje, in which Dutch regular schools can sign up and get additional help and support from experienced teachers. As it seems, teachers are eager to learn and develop their knowledge when working with NAMS, by participating in webinars, trainings or by collaborating with more experienced educators and schools.

Suggestions for Improvement

Common Strategy

During the interviews a very interesting concept was developed. That a common strategy between schools that work with refugee and migrant children and regular ones would change many existing uncertainties. Harriet suggested that "*We need a common strategy and a different perspective with more emotional support and motivation for the students*". Linda also stated that a website connecting all schools in the area and forming a common strategy would be beneficial. These quotes suggest that this common strategy requires more cooperation between the transition classes and regular schools, based on both the needs of the students and the teachers.

Language-based Educational Approach

Also, a different language-based educational approach in teaching refugee and migrant children was proposed by many teachers. More specifically, a female secondary school teacher suggested that "*We should change our expectations and the way of teaching. We should apply a language focus teaching for every subject*". In line with this proposal, another primary teacher suggested that: "*We can use the mother tongue of the students in our advantage*", claiming that if the students can speak their mother tongue sufficiently, then it's easier to develop their Dutch language

skills. Other respondents made similar recommendations referring to the native language of the students which is not used enough in the ISKs.

Funds

Despite the fact that the government provides additional funding to the schools that have NAMS as an extra support, more money was also suggested by most respondents. An experienced teacher in refugee and migrant education said, for example, that “*generally, in both general and refugee education more funds are needed*”. Also, Todd said that “*money would be useful in hiring more assistants and can contact professionals for help when it’s needed, because we don’t always do that due to the lack of money*”. Finally, Linda commented that “*It would be nice if there is more money for help*”. These imply that educational programs for the integration in NAMS at schools are currently underfunded.

Policy

In terms of policy, five from the nine participants mentioned the fact that the time the students spend in the introductory classes and schools is limited and that’s why the students find their transition to the regular school challenging. Specifically, Miriam said that “*Our students stay in our school for one or two years and it’s not enough*”, and she concluded that students need more time to catch up and adjust better in regular schools. In general, teachers suggest that students need to spend more time in preparatory classes before their transfer to a regular school, by focusing on the children and their learning possibilities, and how they can use their skills to go further in the Dutch educational system.

Professional support

More professional support is also important according to the respondents. In particular, Todd commented that “*We need more professionals with knowledge to support teachers and children with their trauma and well-being*”. In addition to that, Sandra stated: “*In my school there are a lot of children who need help from psychologists but they have to go outside the school and then they have to wait in a waiting list and the problem grows.*”. The analysis revealed that the professional support is essential when they have to deal with students’ mental health, highlighting that psychological support inside the school is extremely important.

Training and education

Finally, as training and education is also used as a means to support teachers who are working in refugee and migrant education, the participants also proposed that extra education and constant training is always needed. A teacher working in a regular school commented: *“Teachers in regular schools don’t always know what to do with these children and they definitely need more training.”* As a result, they come across situations that they cannot address and additional support from experienced colleagues is not always a choice.

Moreover, another experienced teacher stated: *“Teachers need to learn more in many levels, so training should not be optional, but well-organized by the government or districts”*. A compulsory common education and training is necessary based on the opinions of the teachers, for achieving high-quality guidance for the teachers in both regular schools and transition classes. This is also illustrated in the Harriet’s suggestion: *“we need good quality teachers and assistants with knowledge”*.

Discussion

The findings revealed that a common strategy on how teachers approach NAMS education is missing, on the contrary their strategies are based on personal effort, research and additional training. Moreover, the well-being of the students seems to be crucial not only for the learning process but also for their integration in the school environment; thus, the existence of professional support for the students also concerns the teachers. Finally, the lack of proper training and education troubles most the teachers, who identify knowledge as a fundamental factor which will improve the current challenges.

Challenges

For the challenges, it was expected prior the interviews that they would vary amongst regular teachers and experienced teachers working in schools with only refugee and migrant children or in ISKs. However, within their answers some similarities were noted. Most of the existing challenges concern the classroom and the way students interact with each other and their teachers. In addition, since the student population is diverse and does not display the same educational competences, teachers struggle to meet their individual needs and dedicate much time to each student.

The educational background of the students has an impact in their learning performance and challenges teachers in the teaching procedure (EACEA, 2019). Students’ behavior seems to have a great impact on their integration in the classroom and in their learning development and teachers cannot always deal with disruptive behavior. This comes in line with the results of the study by

Geerling, Thijs and Verkuyten (2018), who showed that Dutch teachers tend to experience less self-efficacy with ethnic minority students. This reflects to their ability to promote and support the cognitive, emotional and linguistic achievements of the students (Biasutti, et al., 2020).

Except the limited time, that is more an administrative challenge, the rest of them reflect on the role of teachers' agency which facilitates students learning and development (Toom et al., 2015).

Strategies

In order to overcome these challenges in their daily interactions with refugee and migrant children, teachers follow certain strategies. Schools and teachers have the freedom to choose the most convenient methods for their context. This has the advantage that the selected methods meet the learning needs and educational level of the students. However, not everyone is familiar with these methods and their choice depends more on their experience and the support they have from the school. So, in conclusion we cannot generalize that the methods mentioned are known to the majority of teachers, especially to those who work in the mainstream schools. This resonates with the literature suggesting that a lot of competences are demanded for the teachers, but most of them do not have any experience at all in working with NAMS (Tudjaman et al., 2016).

Support for teachers

Regarding the support and assistance provided to teachers, before the present study, there were already many reports about organizations like LOWAN (Tudjman et al., 2016; OCW, 2016), which provide information, consulting and material for the teachers who work with non-native students. Also, for issues related to the mental health of the students, and especially refugee children, the school and the teachers have the opportunity to reach intern specialists- when they exist- and external associates, to provide children the necessary support in collaboration with the school environment. As also shown by EACEA's report (2019), European educational systems for NAMS take into consideration the importance of students' social and emotional needs for their integration, however, in many cases, there are no specialists, psychologists or consultants in the school and the process of inviting an external professional frequently is proven time consuming.

Suggestions

In the light of the above, it is not surprising that the most prioritized suggestion by the teachers focused on the need for quality improvement of the education, resources, professional support and specific materials for NAMS. Afterall, these factors compose the main supplies to provide a sufficient foundation for refugee and migrant education. One suggestion that was repeated by several teachers was that of a common strategy. Although the Dutch education system is very autonomous and characterized by the freedom that schools have, teachers pointed out that a common strategy for refugee and migrant students would benefit both themselves and the students. Therefore,

knowledge should be communicated between and within to increase schools' profit of inclusive practices (Cassity & Gow, 2006). Intercultural training and education, as addressed in the theoretical framework of this study, appears to frame the necessary approach in teaching mixed pupil population (Leeman & Ledoux, 2010).

Conclusion - Recommendations

The guiding question in this study was: *what kind of challenges teachers face in the integration of refugee and migrant children in the Dutch educational system and what kind of strategies they use to overcome them?* The main findings of this study indicate that the challenges that teachers face in the classroom and the strategies they use in order to overcome them influence the integration of NAMS in the classroom and in the educational system in general. This is especially true for mainstream Dutch schools where the teachers do not acquire the relevant competencies, experience and support for teaching NAMS. Moreover, it seems that in schools with mainly refugee and migrant children the policy and context for these students is explicit and teachers are familiar with the methods and resources that can help them enhance their academic and personal development. On the contrary, teachers working in regular schools face more obstacles and barriers regarding the teaching process and their meaningful communication with their non-native students. As a result, it is necessary to form a more organized policy towards refugee and migrant education, and at the same time ensure that the teachers who work with these students are qualified and have access to additional and continuous support.

In order to improve the current situation and the barriers that teachers face in refugee and migrant education, additional attention must be given to education and training. Ideally, teacher education should educate teachers to have a broad vision of the differences between pupils. According to Causey, Thomas and Armento (2000), when in teacher education, the students have a simple picture of the world that is characterized by "optimistic individualism" (p. 281) and hence, they believe in democracy and egalitarianism. In the Netherlands no research is available for this issue, but the situation is similar (Leeman & Ledoux, 2010). Some work has been done to assist teachers' learning about diversity, intercultural, multicultural, inclusive education in the field of education, but still the teachers do not have a clear image about the different meanings of these concepts (Lund, 2003). If teachers and other professionals are trained to support the specific needs of NAMS, language learning, overcoming interruptions in schooling or limited education, adjusting to a new education environment and developing a sense of belonging can be achieved (Cerna, 2019).

Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this study lies in the heterogenous profile of the participants who were teachers from different contexts and schools in the Netherlands. Hence, the results are not limited to one level or type of education. The perspectives of teachers from regular schools, refugee and migrant schools and ISKs contributed to a more comprehensive idea of the current situation for the themes discussed. A possible limitation of this study was the language barrier. The interviews were conducted in English, which is not the native language of myself or of the participants. As a result, it was often difficult for both sides to express ourselves. Nevertheless, this did not obstruct answering the research questions in this study.

Moreover, the interviews were held online due to the coronavirus regulations. Due to this, real time discussions and observations could not take place. Physical presence is most of the time an advantage for the researcher, as communication is more direct and productive (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). For future research, it would be more effective to conduct the interviews face to face, so the researchers can also observe the participants and their school environment. Finally, the research is only focused on the Dutch context and all the data are referring to the Dutch educational system. As a result, a generalization of the produced data is not applicable in a different context. So, a future research could compare the situation in the Netherlands with another European country with similar characteristics that has a better integration system or face more difficulties with refugee and migrant education.

Implications

This study comes with some implications as well. The research findings can influence decisions at many levels: in developing practice guidelines and policy, in designing educational programmes. In particular, the findings have implications for teachers' professional learning and school development, by embedded learning that involves other colleagues, as teacher collaboration seems to be fruitful setting for developing knowledge that can stimulate teacher learning and innovation (Riveros et al., 2012). Some of the participants reported such efforts, creating the kind of relational structures that improve conditions for their individual and collaborative practices. Finally, policy makers can revise the current educational system, by taking into account that limited time in ISKs challenges the teachers, as a result this time could be formulated according to students' level and progress.

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