INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the world experienced the worst refugee crisis since World War II, with almost 50 million people being forcibly displaced. At the end of 2015, more than 162,000 people had applied for asylum in Sweden, a 500% increase compared with 2010. Due to the war in Syria, the group of Syrian refugees accounted for the highest
percentage of the asylum applicants (Swedish Migration Agency, 2017). Shown in Figure 1, the number of refugees was greatly reduced in 2016, owing to reform of Swedish immigration policy, stricter rules and border controls that discouraged immigrants from choosing Sweden as a host country (ibid).

Effective ways to increase social interaction and to make better use of newcomers’ professional skills, knowledge and experience have been discussed at both international and national levels (OECD, 2016; Swedish NAO, 2014). In Europe, efforts are being made to utilize the qualifications of newly arrived migrants (European Commission, 2016). Unfortunately, integration policy efforts in various European countries have not proven sufficiently effective in creating equal conditions for migrant groups (Björkman & Spehar, 2019). Immigrants and refugees have experienced considerable difficulty in integrating into host societies and accessing their labour markets (European Commission, 2016; Forslund et al., 2017). It has been claimed that Sweden is the European country that requires the longest time for immigrants, including high-skilled professionals, to establish themselves in the labour market, lasting seven to eight years in average (Eriksson et al., 2017). With this, there is a risk that their skills and competence can be lost (OECD, 2016). Many immigrants come from home countries where the school systems and labour markets are structurally very different from those of Sweden, which partially explains the high level of unemployment among newcomers born outside the EU (European Commission, 2016). The differences in school systems concerns, for example educational context, like teaching methods, classroom practice, teacher–student interactions, student influence and size of classes.

In later years, immigrants to Sweden have had higher educational qualifications and professional credentials than those who arrived in earlier periods (SCB, 2018). According to Statistics Sweden, 54% of the refugees who entered Sweden between 2013 and 2017 have at least three years of post-secondary education. With the large number of people arriving in Sweden in autumn 2015, and given the occupational shortage in various sectors, special efforts were made to accelerate their integration. The government, through a parliamentary agreement, decided that the new immigrants’ skills and competences should be better utilized (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2016). This led to the Fast Track programme for labour market establishment, intended to assist newcomers to find jobs related to their professional or work experience (ibid). These integrated projects were planned and designed for new immigrants with qualifications or experience in professional fields where Sweden lacks workers. These include medical fields (medicine, dentistry and nursing), the legal profession, and social sciences and economics, but Sweden also requires workers such as electricians, truck drivers, painters and chefs. However, experienced teachers have been one of the programme’s primary targets. Sweden suffers from a shortage of teachers at schools and preschools. This is due to the demographic changes in Sweden with an increasing number of pupils alongside scarce number of teacher graduates. The teacher shortage has been a political concern for some years, and it shows no sign of easing (Swedish Public Employment service, 2019). The need for recruitment is found at all organizational levels.

Qualified teachers from immigrant backgrounds are usually considered ‘skilled immigrants’, a term used to describe individuals with high levels of education and good work experience in their countries of origin.

![FIGURE 1 Number of asylum seekers in Sweden 2010–2016. Source: Swedish Migration Agency, 2017](image-url)
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(Sabharwal, 2013). In this context, Myles, Cheng and Wang (2006) stated that the foreign-trained teachers’ knowledge, skills and expertise are crucially important for school communities. Their assets include awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity, bilingual skills and first-hand knowledge of immigrant experiences. These professionals with their educational and professional skills would make significant contributions to the educational communities (ibid). In December 2015, 3303 newly arrived immigrants with qualifications and experience in teaching were registered with the Swedish Public Employment Service. Of these, 1900 spoke Arabic, of whom 247 were preschool teachers, 1075 were primary school teachers, 501 were secondary school teachers, and 77 were vocational teachers (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2016).

The Fast Track for Newly Arrived Teachers and Preschool Teachers programme started in 2016 and more than 1200 participants have since completed it. The programme has been accessible to Arabic-speaking immigrants only, except from one group of 20 participants with other mother tongues. All participants hold degrees in teaching or have teaching experience. The time needed to become a certified teacher in Sweden varies depending on the participants’ previous education. Everyone is required adequate proficiency in Swedish, that is fulfilled course in Swedish as a second language. Many need to complete a supplementary teacher education at the university, which involves full-time study for a period ranging from five weeks up to two years. In contrast to the vast majority of Fast Track streams in Sweden, the Fast Track for teachers and preschool teachers has a majority of female participants: 70% women and 30% men, (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2019).

The Fast Track for Newly Arrived Teachers and Preschool Teachers is different from other Fast Track streams in that it does not lead to a diploma; instead, it is considered to be an introduction to the Swedish school system. The programme is not required for entering the educational labour market.

The Fast Track programme was created by six hosting universities in Sweden in collaboration with teaching unions, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions and the Swedish Public Employment Service. Its basic aim was to integrate immigrant teachers into the labour market as soon as possible. The structural framework of the Fast Track for Teachers and Preschool Teachers covers both theory and practice. The theoretical part provides knowledge on three main themes:

• The history, organization and values of the Swedish school system
• Social relations, conflict management and educational leadership
• Didactic perspectives and documentation of learning.

On average, two days per week are given over to lectures on theory at a university. Everyday teaching includes lectures, seminars, group work and group discussions in addition to individual study projects. Learning at the university is accompanied by an internship for an average of two days per week, known as APL (arbetsplatsförlagt lärande) or ‘situated learning’. In APL, participants attend schools or preschools and observe and participate in the teaching process throughout the 26 weeks. Teacher preparation and the internship take place simultaneously with the participants learning Swedish for one day per week. In this way, the participants learn the theoretical basis on which the Swedish educational system is built (i.e. the theory part taught at university) and relate theory to practice (during the internship period), while at the same time developing their language competence. Through this integration process, immigrant teachers are partially prepared to participate effectively in the teaching and the learning processes in Sweden.

In April 2019, 38 groups had completed the Fast Track programme nationwide and an evaluation was constructed to get an insight to the participants’ experiences of the programme. The evaluation was given through a questionnaire that was distributed from the University of Stockholm to all previous participants in the Fast Track for Teachers and Preschool Teachers programme. In this questionnaire, the research questions for this study were included. Most previous participants have years of studies ahead of them (in the Swedish language and complementary theoretical courses) before they will be able to obtain their Swedish teaching licence and thereby the
opportunity for a permanent job. At the time of the questionnaire, 30% of the respondents reported that they had a job as a teacher in a Swedish school or preschool.

Our aim with this study is to investigate how previous participants in the Fast Track perceive their professional development after having taken part of the programme.

**PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

There are several studies on immigrants’ integration into the Swedish labour market. Previous studies and reports reveal many challenges and barriers faced by immigrants entering the Swedish labour market. A study by Bucken-Knapp et al., (2019) focused on how refugees in Sweden view the experience of the so-called Introduction Programme for Immigrants. Using a qualitative case study of Syrian refugees, the study addressed the quality of Swedish language training, the complexity of the education qualification validation process and complex bureaucracy as the main obstacles for this group to access the labour market.

Entering the Swedish educational labour market as an immigrant is one of the fields with major challenges, partly due to the importance of language within this field (Emilsson & Mozetic, 2019). Sandlund (2010) studied the role of current discourses in the Swedish educational system, where idealizing the Swedish school and devaluing the professional experience and prior training of teachers with a migrant background was present. Seven immigrant teachers were targeted in the study. The study reveals that these teachers’ previous experiences and skills were seldom in demand at the workplace. The study shows that it takes time for the teachers to generate legitimacy at the workplace. These results of devaluation are similar to those reported by Bigestans (2015), who studied experiences of teachers from foreign backgrounds who started working in Swedish educational labour market after completing compulsory language courses. The immigrant teachers in the study face new colleagues undervaluing their experiences and knowledge gained from abroad. Moreover, their challenges when entering the teaching labour market in Sweden were mainly in the practical part of the teaching role and in communication. The key findings of the study were that some of the challenges are caused by wide disparities in educational school systems, which led to difficulties in understanding the new educational context, like teaching methods and teacher−student interactions.

In recent years, several studies aimed to study the Fast Track for newly arrived teachers and preschool teachers in Sweden have been made. To begin with, Bengtsson and Mickwitz (2019) reveal formal obstacles that face foreign immigrant teachers. These obstacles are comparable to the formal institutional conditions shown in the studies above and include obtaining a teacher’s ID and succeeding with the Swedish language requirement. Bengtsson and Mickwitz also found that knowledge about the Swedish school was gained when participating in the programme. Ennerberg and Economou (2020) had similar results revealing that the structural factors limit the opportunity to actively enter educational jobs and to try to take Swedish teaching licence. On the other hand, the Fast Track helped the participants to better understand both the Swedish school system and thus the culture. In addition, the course gave them the opportunity to participate in identity work on a more personal level. The study exposes that things that were seen as difficult to grasp before the course, became clearer during and after the Fast Track. These factors had to do with finding other type of jobs in schools such as teaching assistants and using their knowledge to navigate a school system for their own children. Also, Economou and Hajer (2019) reviled in their study challenges met for Fast Track participants because of differences between the Swedish and Syrian education systems. Their study recommends adjustments to the curriculum of Fast Track because of the challenges participants faced. A central finding was that the participants were strongly motivated to be part of the Swedish educational context and to adopt more student-centred learning and significant development in more participation-oriented teaching values.

To further understand the obstacles regarding social norms and culture, Bengtsson and Mickwitz (2019) found in their study, mentioned above, that the socialization process of adjusting and adapting to the values and norms
of Swedish schools needs time and thus is a hindrance in the establishment context. These informal conditions based on norms and values concern what is considered part of the teaching profession in Sweden. Their study revealed that the process for newly arrived teachers is largely about their interactions with the regulatory structures they encounter during the Fast Track process and their own approach and behaviour. The effects of new norms on participant in the Fast Track was also investigated by Ennerberg and Economou (2020). When examining how the immigrant teachers handle and experience the various teaching norms and the new teaching environment, the participants experienced that they were helped through participation in the Fast Track. The disparity between an immigrant’s cultural and social norms and those of native Swedes is addressed as an issue in integration process, in this sense, Ennerberg and Economou (2020) indicated that migrant pedagogies may face problems related to acculturation, which is recognized as challenges related to the adoption or adaptation of different values and norms of the dominant society.

Our study is different from those above in the sense that we consider the participants’ experiences of professional development in relation to both human capital theory and social capital theory. We include all participants who completed the Fast Track at six universities from year 2016 to 2019 and conduct qualitative interviews alongside with quantitative data. The aim of this study is to explore the presence of human capital and social capital among participants in the Fast Track and to get an insight to the participants’ perceptions on their professional development.

**THEORETICAL FRAME: HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Human capital theory is one of the key theories that supports the integration of immigrants into the labour market in a host country. The concept of human capital was introduced by Adam Smith's economic model of human-resource capitalism (Schultz, 1992). The main essence of Smith's model concerns the set of professional experiences, skills, education, knowledge, language and any other characteristics that are relevant to a person's ability to function in a workplace (Eriksson et al., 2017). According to Blundell, Dearden, Meghir, and Sianeni (1999), the basic components of human capital are innate ability, acquisition of knowledge and qualification through formal education, and skills gained through professional experience. Many previous studies used years of schooling, labour market experience and proficiency of language as the standard measures of human capital (Byoun, 2014).

A person's human capital is often crucial to coping in the labour market (Eriksson et al., 2017). Furthermore, human capital can provide an opportunity for identifying, creating and strengthening social interaction, which may be useful in the labour market (Mossaad, 2014). Wang (2003) stated that the individual immigrants' skills and qualifications easily can be transferred into good practices in their host countries. Facilitating transference of professional immigrants' skills and competence obtained abroad into the new context can allow them to remain active in the labour market, which can resolve the professional challenges of unemployment and finding jobs appropriate for their qualifications (Mossaad, 2014). In this context, Eriksson et al., (2017) argued that human capital can be acquired both in Sweden and in the country of origin, but it is reasonable to assume that at least some of the human capital acquired in the country of origin is not transferable to the Swedish labour market, in particular, language skills and other country-specific knowledge. However, many previous studies show that professional migrants are still prevented from unlocking their professional skills in the labour market and are often overqualified for their jobs (Mossaad, 2014; Quintini, 2011). This could be referred to as Human capital waste (Salmonsson & Mella, 2013).

The teachers in our study are a group of skilled immigrants that according to Collins and Reid (2012) can enrich the host society with genuinely beneficial teaching informed by their educational qualifications and significant global experience of teaching. Schmidt, Young, and Mandzuk (2010) and Wang (2003) asserted that teachers with immigrant backgrounds play a key role in easing the integration of migrant children into a host country; they can actively assist integration in a multicultural context.
Human capital theory evades contextual factors. This is why it is necessary to include social capital to fully understand professional development. Social capital provides a deeper understanding of immigrant teachers' reflections on their social interactions and their participation in the programme. The theory of social capital is based on the idea that social networks provide value to participants by giving them access to social resources (Putnam, 2001). Being a member of social groups allows access to resources and collective understanding (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Furthermore, this theory assumes that the social networks, personal ties and relationships with natives have a significant impact on the successful professional integration of immigrants (ibid). Social capital is inherent in social networks; it is a form of capital captured through social relations and social interaction between individuals and groups, which can generate many resources (Reyes et al., 2018). The notion of social capital refers to the set of social ties that exist between individuals and groups and their quality (Beames & Atencio, 2008).

In the same context, Putnam (2001) described two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. These can be gained from shared experiences, social norms or shared purposes. Bonding social capital refers to social ties between relatively homogeneous groups of people (ibid) based on common interests and backgrounds. These individuals build closer peer relationships that develop bonding social capital (Oztok et al., 2013). Therefore, these closed community ties can create an environmental condition where individuals are willing to exchange knowledge and information across existing social contacts (Wasko & Faraj, 2005, cited in Oztok et al, 2013). Similarity, Ryabov (2009) stated that dense networks linking newly arrived immigrants to opportunities for education and profession provide a supportive environment for further educational and career aspirations. When looking at bonding social capital in terms of integration, we find critique in the sense that bonding with the notion on ‘social support’ leads to less integration in the new culture. This is due to the homogeneous characteristics of group members that in such networks are less likely to communicate new information and thus interact with the ‘new culture’ (Briggs, 1998).

Bridging social capital is the other dimension of social capital. This is defined as the relationships between heterogeneous groups from different cultures or socio-economic backgrounds. This type of social capital serves as ‘a basis for collective action’ by enabling people to share their knowledge and experiences, secure resources that are not accessible to homogeneous groups, and to establish common values and prosocial goals (Pigg & Crank, 2004). These bridging relations (or weak ties) can be of special value to individuals, because they serve as a bridge between contacts (Putnam, 2001). In an educational setting, learning occurs by participating in discussions, exchanging opinions, and being exposed to new ideas and experiences. This means that new knowledge and resources are acquired through bridging social capital, allowing people to create opportunities and develop their careers at an earlier stage (Barwick, 2016).

Combination of bonding and bridging social capital is considered to promote collaboration and support creativity in networks (Daskalaki, 2010). In short, both of these forms of social capital are important influences on educational outcomes; bridging social capital explains how individuals learn from others from different backgrounds to gain a deep knowledge of subject matter from diverse perspectives. The bridging social capital role is critical for connecting individual immigrants to the new society, while bonding social capital can aid knowledge acquisition and greatly improve the learning process in a community (Oztok et al, 2013).

There is a strong relationship between human and social capital. Falk (2000) stated that the human capital consists of the skills and knowledge gathering from both formal and informal learning, whereas social capital is constructed by engaging in meaningful interactions between individuals and groups. Active and sustainable learning can therefore be promoted by social capital, which in turn can improve individual human capital. This corresponds to Coleman's (1988) view that social capital leads to the creation of human capital. The connections established by individuals facilitate the acquisition of resources and discovery of opportunities for development (Felício et al., 2014).

If human capital with its focus on knowledge and experience could be classified as the formal demand and a base for entering a workforce, in integration terms, social capital can be a key component for integration. When
creating new links with different groups and strengthening existing relationships in a new society this would result in a greater community, meaningful interactions and trust in each other according to Putnam (2001). The social capital process could thus contribute to an increased sense of belonging, increased civic engagement and can contribute to integration into the labour market (ibid).

This study’s aim is to look into perceived professional development and does not intend to focus on integration per se. Which type of integration that could take place in our study is not of interest here, if this integration is a one-way, assimilating process or a two-way process, including the contribution people make other than just using their human capital.

METHOD AND BIASES

Our study uses both qualitative and quantitative data to examine the participants’ perspectives on their human and social capital development through their participation in Fast Track. Quantitative data were gathered through a web-based questionnaire. A total of 1100 participants completed Fast Track in all six universities during the period from April 2016 to April 2019. This questionnaire was sent to 1042 participants for whom we had current email addresses. We received 548 responses after two reminders, an overall response rate of 53%. The response rate could have been affected by the relatively high amount of questions (37). Also, the group of respondents has shown a lack of computer skills. To ensure that respondents completely understood the survey questions, the questionnaire was available in both Swedish and Arabic.

Our definition of human capital development for the Fast Track participants is the skills and knowledge acquired through understanding teaching and learning processes in the Swedish educational context. Moreover, achieving progress in the professional language is a part of our definition of human capital development. Social capital becomes a part of this integration to the society through its integration possibilities, we consider here both bridging and bonding social capital. The following items from our questionnaire reveal how the participants see their own development in human capital: The content of the theoretical course (sub-courses 1, 2 and 3) has contributed to my professional development as a teacher in Sweden. Workplace learning has contributed to my knowledge of Swedish schools and/or preschools. Studies of Swedish during the project have contributed to my professional development as a teacher in Sweden. The participants rate their agreement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) for each item. The social capital content is not explicitly found in the questionnaire but is visible in the interviews conducted in addition to the questionnaire, explained ahead.

Alongside the survey, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 participants to obtain a deeper understanding of how the participants’ viewed their professional development and their descriptions of experiences and obstacles. Bonding and bridging social capital were captured in the answers from interviewees. These interviews were conducted via telephone, and each lasted around 30 minutes. The interviews were all conducted by one Arabic-speaking teacher from the Fast Track.

A study like this needs to be critically analysed for forms of bias. There is a risk of power asymmetry as a hierarchical order could be present (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). A consequence of power asymmetry could be that the interviewees do not share their perspective fully. The experience from the interviewer closely having followed participants in the groups closely, leads to a risk of interpreting answers in a biased way. This needs to be taken into account when analysing the interviews. A factor that could offset this bias is that the analyse of transcripts were conducted together with the co-writer.

The structure of interviews was based on key topics concerning integration, for example how do you evaluate your participation in the Fast Track, if you have met obstacles, which ones? What have you benefited from the Fast Track? Part of it evolved open questions in regard to the experiences of social interaction with teachers and peers during the programme.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG PARTICIPANTS OF THE FAST TRACK

Professional development in our study refers to teachers developing and improving their competences to meet the needs in the new educational context. It is a process of expanding the teachers’ knowledge and skills to implement the best practices of teaching and learning.

To get an insight to the professional development among the participants of the Fast Track, we start off by presenting the Human Capital of the group. This is based on their formal education and teaching experience before entering Sweden. Within our group of Fast Track participants, as shown in Figure 2, we found a variety of educational levels: the majority have bachelor’s degrees (43%), another group has two years of post-secondary education (31%) and those in the third group have bachelor’s degrees plus a diploma in teaching (21%). A few have master’s degrees or doctorates. The figure below shows the level of education held, broken down by gender.

Another part of human capital is professional experience. The number of years that the participants in our questionnaire had worked as teachers before entering Sweden varied widely, from no experience to more than 25 years, shown in Figure 3.

Looking at the participants’ views of the outcome of the Fast Track programme, the questionnaire shows that all the sub-courses appear to be of similar value to the participants. The question that is asked is ‘To what extent (ranging from 1 to 6 where 1 is to a little extent and 6 is to a high extent) has the course content contributed to your knowledge and professional development?’ In general, we found that the vast majority of respondents...
answered positively. The total weighted mean is 4.64 of the theoretical courses 4.66, APL 4.77 and Swedish studies 4.35, which correspond to the weights of the three parts of the project.

Workplace learning is seen by some participants as an opportunity to develop professional skills and receive the hands-on experience they need. Of the respondents, 83% (325) agreed with the statement about workplace-based learning: ‘APL has contributed to my knowledge of Swedish schools/preschools’. In their responses to an open question, many respondents indicated that APL was the most important part, where they could see practically how the teaching-learning process occurs in Swedish schools.

Finally, according to the participants, Swedish studies and Swedish professional training also produces professional development. Of the respondents, 73% agreed and only 3% disagreed with the statement: ‘Swedish studies during the project have contributed to my professional development as a teacher in Sweden’. An analysis using an independent samples test indicates no gender differences in responses. Our analysis also shows the participants’ age and level of Swedish are not of importance in their experience, knowledge and professional development.

In summary, the quantitative data show a measurable level of perceived human capital development, which is putative to this project and its participants. However, some participants do place themselves in categories where they experience no or very little professional development after being part of Fast Track.

Looking at the interviews and thus adding social capital to the analyse, participation in the 26-week integrated programme seems to be an opportunity to create a social network. Bonding social capital enabled to some extent emotional support and solidarity to the participants as well as the sharing of knowledge and experience. This corresponds to Coleman (1988) who stated that networks involve individuals that provide mutual support because they share a similar background and social identity. In addition, Gopee (2002) argued that social support can have an influence on one’s personal and professional learning. The bonding social capital is presented in the quotes below.

I built good social relationships while participating in Fast Track with peers who have the same interests and background. We have the same culture, and we were able to discuss many topics in the course and other topics. I enjoyed the discussions, which enhanced my knowledge.

(Respondent 12, over 26 years of experience)

I was alone in Sweden as my family is still in Syria; my meeting with my colleagues during the course helped me overcome this crisis.

(Respondent 7, 6–10 years of experience)

Discussions and interaction when we are at the university has had a major role in the development of my career as a teacher in the Swedish school. We identified differences in teaching methods, as well as similarities between our schools and the Swedish school.

(Respondent 9, 11–25 years of experience)

In addition to the examples of bonding social capital above, bridging social capital is found in many examples of interactions between participants and teachers or mentors representing new cultural and educational context. Here the heterogeneity and understanding derived from the new culture is in focus. The extracts below illustrate how bridging interactions can provide professional development.

The lectures that we heard at university were not exactly traditional as in our country; we were not only listeners during the lecture, but we also asked the teachers many questions. (...) We wanted to know everything related to working as teachers in Swedish schools.

(Respondent 17, 11-25 years of experience)
Many participants stated that the network opportunities enabled them to learn themes discussed during the course. Due to the Arabic-speaking teachers who had been in Sweden for a relatively long time and often had experience of the teaching profession in Swedish schools, we found that the majority of respondents have the experiencing of professional development. In this context, Economou and Hajer (2019) highlighted the significant role of Swedish–Arabic bilingual teachers in bridging the cultural gap between Sweden and the participants’ home countries in terms of values and norms.

I appreciate the presence of the Arabic-speaking educators on this course; they speak our language and have clarified issues adequately, so there is no confusion in understanding the topics. There was a great deal of interaction when discussing many things, especially regarding the role of the teacher, conflict resolution, values and norms and teaching methods.

(Respondent 3, 11–26 years of experience)

According to Bigestans (2015), mentors at schools and preschools can be valuable to foreign teachers from a positioning perspective, because this allows them to recognize a lack of knowledge about Swedish schools and ask questions about the basic conditions, without appearing incompetent in front of the entire staff.

The course gave me the opportunity through vocational training at the school to meet a mentor from a completely different background. The interactions between us and discussions, exchanges of ideas and the good relationship that I built with [the mentor] gave me enough information and knowledge about working in Swedish schools.

(Respondent 17, 11–25 years of experience)

KEY OBSTACLES TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TO THE INTEGRATION PROCESS

During the interviews, we identified several obstacles to the participants’ integration and to professional development. These challenges are twofold. On the one hand, participants express frustration because of the processes of the Swedish authorities and the jurisdiction. This also has to do with the age or economic status of the participant. On the other hand, there are obstacles attributable to cultural and social issues, including Swedish language proficiency.

The first category of obstacles includes the evaluation of former credentials. The Swedish National Agency for Education does not value the immigrant’s work experience, which could be defined as ‘human capital devaluation’ (Salmonsson & Mella, 2013). The experience of the long period of time before qualifying for a teaching licence and the immigrant’s age are other examples in this category.

My experience in teaching exceeds 15 years, which has not been taken into consideration and my education has been undervalued, so I made a decision not to complete my studies. I will seek a job in a school context as a student or teaching assistant.

(Respondent 16, 11–25 years of experience)

I do not intend to continue my study in order to obtain the teaching licence, which requires more than 3 years (…) as my age does not allow me to study, I would like to work and pay the tax and do not wish to waste more time.

(Respondent 15, over 26 years of experience)
Another challenge in this structural category of obstacles is immigrant status with temporary citizenship.

I have really benefited being a part of the Fast Track but because of my temporarily citizenship my only focus now is to get a permanent job as soon as possible.

(Respondent 1, 6–10 years of experience)

In the cultural and social category of obstacles, there is a wide range of experiences. Often these obstacles interact. The challenges concern cultural differences and acceptance, professional status and language barriers. The fear of not fitting in also became apparent.

I feel ready to work as a teacher, but I am afraid since I wear a Hijab, which some people might not accept.

(Respondent 9, 11–25 years of experience)

Language barriers seem to be a major concern in our group. When teachers encounter challenges in their work, they feel threatened, which may in turn affect their self-image and professional identity (Nias, 1996). The ability to communicate with pupils and colleagues is required for the socialization process offered by workplace experience (Bengtsson & Mickwitz, 2019). A knowledge of Swedish is critical for participants in the school, particularly for understanding and becoming part of the Swedish school culture.

How can I communicate with the pupils at APL when they ask me something and I do something else because I misunderstand? The pupils are no longer dealing with me because they don’t trust me any longer, and all this because of my insufficient Swedish.

(Respondent 3, 6–10 years of experience)

Acquiring new knowledge requires newly arrived teachers to understand and apply the social elements of learning and teaching in local contexts. Differences between educational contexts have been identified in previous studies. Teacher–learner relationships differ, and the foreign teachers from quite different educational systems have difficulty understanding the roles required of the teacher and the active involvement of pupils in Swedish classroom interactions (Economou & Hajer, 2019).

There is a cultural difference between Syria and Sweden. As newly arrived teachers, we had to learn about the new community and school system in Sweden. A teacher is in the centre in our county; he is the master of the class and students have to obey. Pupils cannot discuss the selective subject or how the learning–teaching process is carried out.

(Respondent 6, 11–25 years of experience)

In my country, the teacher has high status, and everyone shows him respect. I don’t want to work as a teacher (in Sweden).

(Respondent 2, 11–26 years of experience)

DISCUSSION

Although the response rate of our questionnaire is modest, the answers of our 548 previous participants give us important clues and are of great value in understanding professional development of this group. The vast majority of participants state that they experience strong professional development from taking part in Fast Track. The
content of the programme is viewed as valuable for the profession in the new context. Participants express that they gain knowledge of the Swedish school system, curriculum and learning theories. Many participants were satisfied to a high extent with their vocational work as it improved their learning about the school context and learning process. These results correspond to Bengtsson and Mickwitz (2019) who confirmed the importance of workplace-based learning in integration and professional socialization. Our study confirms that when immigrant teachers are placed in Swedish schools, they can gain a deeper understanding of Swedish school culture and become part of it; vocational training in schools offers the opportunity to participate in school practice and to confirm their competence as teachers.

The results of our study highlight the importance of participants interacting with peers and educators at university, as well as with mentors and other teachers during their vocational training at school or preschool. This is because these actions build or strengthen the bonding of social ties and facilitate the generation of bridging social capital, which in turn is essential for immigrant teachers’ professional development and integration.

Our study found that the bonding social capital the participants acquired and developed from interactions in the project provides emotional support, and facilitates our group of teachers’ learning and their professional development. In part of the literature, bonding social capital is viewed as a hindrance to integration, and however, we found no evidence for these claims in our study.

We conclude that the Fast Track programme facilitates bridging social capital at university. By enabling meaningful interactions with university teachers from backgrounds different from their own at university allowed them to access more information, knowledge and experiences about the Swedish educational context. The same reflections were seen in the vocational training at schools and preschools. Many respondents acknowledged their mentors, who supported them in their professional learning and practical understanding of the new teaching context. Programme participants acquire new knowledge by interacting with teachers and mentors from different backgrounds who, in the case of immigrant teachers, have valuable knowledge and experiences about Swedish schools, and also gain an important social network. However, this is not the case for all participants; cases occurred where there was no communication and interaction between mentors and foreign teachers. According to the interviewees, this was attributable to their weakness in the Swedish language.

The interviews in this study reveal challenges facing newly arrived teachers that hinder professional development and their integration into the Swedish teaching profession. These challenges are twofold: firstly, there are hindrances because of the jurisdiction and authorization processes in Sweden. The structural facts are related to the immigrants’ status: this could be residency status, age or the time needed for authorities to manage requests, such as applications for teaching licences. There is an outspoken frustration regarding the time it takes to get a teacher licence in Sweden. The participants express Human capital waste and devaluation of credentials (Salmonsson & Mella, 2013). Secondly, there are differences in the educational context and culture. These challenges are expressed to hinder integration into the new country and into the Swedish teaching profession. The cultural and social challenges may suggest why it must be understood that integration requires longer than just the adaptation of knowledge from a study programme. This is consistent with Bengtsson and Mickwitz’s (2019) results stating that norms and values are not fully gained within 26 weeks. Describing integration in this way implicates an understanding of the integration process where the new immigrants should assimilate into the Swedish norms and values.

Learning the Swedish language well seemed to be the major concern of the teaching professionals in our study. Interestingly, our data show that the immigrant teachers derived the same satisfaction from the theoretical part as from the practical part, no matter their Swedish language level. One could have imagined that being new to the Swedish language would significantly reduce satisfaction with the vocational training because this is the part of the programme when the participant is in a school or preschool in a completely Swedish context and left to communicate in Swedish, but our survey did not show this.

To summarize, to develop professionally, social capital needs to be present for human capital to best develop in a new context. Our study reveals that both bonding and bridging social capital are crucial for professional
development in a new country. However, many obstacles became visible, such as the Swedish administrative processes, cultural barriers, such as language proficiency, and slow adaptation to the new educational context.

**PEER REVIEW**

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