‘First and foremost, we are teachers, not refugees’: Requalification measures for internationally trained teachers affected by forced migration

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Abstract
This article looks deeper into the educational careers and barriers faced by internationally trained teachers with refugee backgrounds. Highly skilled teachers experience among others formal barriers due to the two-subject regime in Austria. This study analyses the barriers and measures that disable or enable the re-qualification of internationally trained teachers who wish to continue their profession in Austria. Guided by a participatory approach laid out by Von Unger in 2014, this study taps into the needs of teaching professionals with refugee backgrounds and led to the development and implementation of a course. The course was compiled to provide educational knowledge as well as pedagogical training. Even though the completed subject of internationally trained teachers was recognised (apart from courses concerning didactics), the fulfilment of regular teacher training in Austria is seen as a conditio sine qua non. Hence, teachers with a different formal-educational background, irrespective of professional expertise, are seen as lacking education and/or skills. Considering that there is no worldwide consensus regarding the content and structure of teacher education, the implication of a lack of skills as well as the need for bridging programmes will be critically discussed from the participants’ perspectives. This article offers insight into the transcultural implications of professionalism.

Keywords
Internationally trained teachers (with a forced migration background), postgraduate course, legal barriers, requalification, recognition, structural limitations to inclusion in the employment market

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Introduction

Internationally trained teachers with a forced migration background, who wish to continue their profession in Austria, experience formal barriers due to the requirement that they study (and teach) two subjects in secondary I and II. In most other countries, teachers need to prove only one subject – and even if their completed subject is recognised (along with some additional courses in didactics, probably), the fulfilment of regular teacher training is seen as a *conditio sine qua non* in Austria. Hence, teachers with a different formal-educational background are seen as lacking education and/or skills, irrespective of professional expertise in their subject. This study introduces (the way to) the Austrian countermeasure: a requalification programme in the shape of a postgraduate Certificate Course called “Educational Basics for Displaced Teachers.” It takes a deeper look at the barriers faced by internationally trained teachers with forced migration backgrounds in Austria. The aim of this study is to tap into the needs of teaching professionals with forced migration backgrounds. The lack of acknowledgement of their professional background has led to the development and implementation of a Certificate Course. The course has been compiled to provide educational knowledge as well as pedagogical training, to qualify or better requalify them for a specific context and fulfil legal requirements. Considering that there is no worldwide consensus regarding the content and structure of teacher education, the present paper will critically discuss the implication of skills’ deficits and the need for bridging programmes, from the participants’ perspectives. Thus, this contribution aims to spark a new discourse, and to re-assess the existing discourse, around acknowledgement of international training. It aims to put the challenges involved in acclaining the transnationally acquired profession in perspective. This could provide solutions to challenges posed by teacher shortages and the growing distance between the life-worlds of pedagogical professionals and the pupils they teach.

The course development as well as the continuous accompanying research were guided by the participatory approach laid out by Von Unger (2014). Findings underlying this study stem from the (participatory) research team’s decision to apply situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) as strategy for analysing data. Core results show that teachers stop to know who they are, both personally and professionally, due to their formal de-qualification, despite their actual competences. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to reform processes of formal acknowledgement and establish an additional track towards formative validation of competences that lead to formal qualification at the European level.

Initiating a programme for so-called internationally trained teachers in Vienna

Initiated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Austria and in light of over 80,000 people having sought asylum in Austria (Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2018), a group of (junior) researchers at the Department of Education, University of Vienna, started exploring the educational background of secondary school teachers, taking a participatory approach. Research has shown that many of those internationally trained teachers (with a forced migration background) were looking forward to returning to work within their profession but could not manage to do so. As the curricula for teacher training differ between countries, migrating teachers face barriers in recognition of their educational training (Kremsner et al., 2020: 32; Proyer et al., 2019a). Syrian teacher training, for example, consists of a bachelor’s degree in one subject. From the standpoint of Austrian recognition services regarding professional requirements for secondary school teachers, Syrian teachers with a bachelor’s degree in one subject lack formal education. Specifically, they lack a second subject, as well as the Basics in Education Studies (which is mandatory in Austrian teacher training). Therefore,
recognition processes for teachers with teacher training that differs from Austrian teacher training\(^4\),
result in a negative appraisal more often than not. What follows is de-qualification of their existing
professional background, regardless of their teaching experience. This implies that many interna-
tionally trained professionals have no other option than to return to their studies until they meet the
Austrian teacher training requirements and/or end up performing jobs way below their qualification
levels, meaning underpaid work (Proyer et al., 2019b). This deficit-oriented view of foreign teacher
training does not take teaching experience and other soft skills into account, and qualification
acquired elsewhere (levels of transnational or transcultural professionalism) is unacclaimed. This
refers to the quote in the title of the present paper, where one of the Certificate Course alumni pro-
claimed that emphasis is often placed on where someone is from and where they were educated,
rather than on what one is actually capable of doing. Thus, not only formal, but also professional
recognition of teachers suffers, such that internationally trained teachers are unable to return to
teaching in (secondary)\(^5\) schools without enormous effort and requalification\(^6\), while experiencing a
lack of recognition in four identified areas (Resch et al., 2019).

Reaching out to the target group of internationally trained teachers was hard at first, since asy-
ylum seekers are not allowed to work, and there are no data on professionals in the pedagogical field
due to differing training profiles (Kremsner et al., 2020). Nevertheless, a participatory research
group was set up in 2015 (consisting of three teachers from Syria and four academic researchers)
to look deeper into the educational careers and barriers faced by internationally trained teachers
with a forced migration background. This formation served as a starting point for participatory
design measures of the Certificate Course while aligning with research efforts.

As a result of the facts stated above and the findings from our exchange and initial research with
internationally trained teachers, the need for a requalification programme transpired. At first, ideas
gathered around a programme to educate internationally trained teachers as either so-called “first-
language teachers” or “inclusive educators.” First-language teachers are employed in Austrian
schools as pedagogical support staff, as there are many students with first languages other than
German. There is a lack of such teachers, but funding was drastically cut around 2017. In addition
– and this is key to further course development – participatory work on a possible further education
programme showed that internationally trained teachers were not aiming to work as pedagogical
support staff but to be (seen as) regular and full teachers again.

These findings correspond with what we know about professional exchange- and requalification
programmes that have been initiated throughout Europe\(^7\). One of the first was the Refugee Teacher
Program, in Potsdam, Germany\(^8\). Nearly all of these programmes have different curricula: some
include language courses, some not, but all have as their goal to minimise the barrier for teachers
to return to teach in classrooms in their new host countries.

**Certificate Course: “Basics in Education Studies for Displaced Teachers”**

The participatory conceptualisation among the research group (see above) resulted in the Viennese
postgraduate course “Basics in Education Studies for Displaced Teachers,” which is a Certificate
Course tied to the University of Vienna Postgraduate Centre and – so far – the only academic pro-
gramme of its kind in Austria. The course includes theoretical university lectures and an internship
in cooperation with schools, and is accredited with 40 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation
System (ECTS) in total\(^9\).

The curriculum consists of eight modules and 250 hours of internship in secondary schools,
with an overall duration of two semesters. The internship is divided into three parts and gradually
leads the participants into teaching a whole lesson in their first subject, with German as
their teaching language. In these phases, participants are guided and supported on a 1:1 basis by mentors, who are regular teachers in the school where the internship takes place. The course covers the basics in education studies found in regular teacher training, with some adaptations, such as an increased number of internship hours and slightly adapted content. Prerequisites for attending the Certificate Course are:

(a) a completed bachelor’s degree in an academically recognised subject that is anchored in the Austrian curriculum;
(b) teaching experience in a secondary school in any country;
(c) verification of German language skills at level B2.2. (certified);
(d) high school diploma (certified translation);
(e) verification of positive asylum or subsidiary protection; and
(f) residence in Vienna, Lower Austria, or Burgenland (due to the fact that the course is a full-time requalification programme held in Vienna).

Applicants have to fulfil all the prerequisites and undergo an application process which consists of an information event as well as a two-hour assessment, including interviews with written and oral components and an onboarding day. As a tailor-made postgraduate course for internationally trained secondary school teachers only, these prerequisites exclude various other groups and/or educational professions, such as kindergarten and elementary school teachers, teachers with migration backgrounds from, for example, neighbouring countries, or teachers with subjects not anchored in the Austrian school curriculum, such as Islamic theology or the Arabic language. The 40 ECTS of the Viennese programme can later be recognised as part of the training curriculum in Austria. Together with their already completed bachelor’s degree (pillar one in the Austrian teacher training system), the certificate of the course can be recognised as the second of the three pillars required for becoming a teacher in Austria. Having fulfilled these two requirements, alumni can start teaching on a special contract.\textsuperscript{10}

The aims of the course are to: (a) convey Basics in Education Studies; and, by doing so, (b) provide the necessary formalities to start teaching in schools on a special contract. As the postgraduate course collaborates with school authorities, the second aim includes the possibility of future employment. After the course, alumni are advised to study a second subject in order to complete the Austrian teacher training and therefore have better chances of employment on a regular contract. Thus, they align with (or even surpass?) the professional level of Austrian teachers.

One might wonder why there is a need for this form of postgraduate course, as the alumni are advised to study the second subject anyway and therefore have to enrol in regular teacher training after completing the course. Beside the fact that the course has slight adaptations and is designed specifically for this group, one crucial argument is that, in Austria, students are not entitled to social benefits such as financial support or welfare in general. As the Certificate Course is full-time, this means that participants would be unable to take part without having enough savings to live for a full year and pay for course fees, or have other means of financial support. In addition, one precondition for enrolment at the University of Vienna is German language skills at level C1\textsuperscript{11}. Since the course is a postgraduate course, held at the University of Vienna Postgraduate Centre, this requirement could be dropped to level B2.2. Knowing the importance of having language level C1, not only for further studies but also for teaching in secondary-schools, a voluntary language course (C1) at the University of Vienna Language Centre is provided for participants. Unlike similar programmes in Europe, the C1 course is not embedded in the curriculum of the Certificate Course. As moving from B2.2. to C1 takes at least a year, starting with B2.2. and taking the language course parallel to the Certificate Course means that teachers benefit from not losing another
year to language preparation. However, it makes the course even more intense, as it is taught on two afternoons a week.

Synergies manifested not only with the University of Vienna Language Centre, but also with other partners and institutions. This – at least at the very beginning rather unexpected – dynamic now reflects the collaborative character of the Certificate Course. Partners include:

(a) the Viennese school authorities, which coordinate the cooperating schools with mentors for the internship;
(b) the Austrian Employment Centre, which agreed to provide financial support in the form of a daily rate for participants attending the certificate programme; and
(c) the European Union-project CORE (Centre for Refugee Empowerment) 12, which supports the course with free use of facilities and payment of mentors.

At the time of writing (August 2020), the third cycle has been completed (November 2019–August 2020). This article focuses on data collected throughout the first round of the course (September 2017–June 2018). Due to – among other factors – political changes, funding partners changed from course to course. So far there are 69 alumni from the first three rounds. Participants came from nine countries and the aim of balancing the male/female ratio of participants was more or less achieved. At the time of writing, more than 50% of alumni from the first and the second rounds have found jobs in the education sector. Due to their recent graduation, employment data concerning the third round remain unclear.

Participatory approach: The foundation of the research activities

As mentioned above, the development of the curriculum and the research project accompanying the course was mainly based on a participatory approach. This remains true, as we retain a participatory research team consisting of alumni and participants, as well as academic researchers. This group meets regularly to discuss current questions and jointly conducts research. Thus, it aims not to undertake research into people or a specific group of people, but – in a spirit of equal cooperation – together with them (Bergold and Thomas, 2010: 333; Kremsner, 2017; Kremsner et al., 2016). As esteemed experts, members of socially marginalised groups – in this case internationally trained teachers with a forced migration background – are involved as active players in the research process. In particular, their perspectives, views, and experiences are the main focus of attention, and their expertise is central. In this regard it must be highlighted that the approach presented here is (mainly) about influencing or even changing the social reality in general, and the lives of those people who can be seen as the target group at the centre of this research in particular (Buchner et al., 2016). Another highly relevant aspect of this approach is that the “intended outcome is to produce an authentic and comprehensive account of problems/issues from all perspectives and, with that, appropriate solutions to bring about concrete actions and change” (MacFarlane and Roche, 2018: 56). In order for this to succeed, however, we first have to clarify the following question (see for example Von Unger, 2014): what beliefs are expressed and to what extent do these correspond to the reality of the lives of the people concerned? Indicated here is that participatory action cannot be undertaken without constant reflection (Von Unger, 2014: 10). According to Von Unger (2014: 2; 44), the participatory approach can be seen as a basic view; the representation of a specific perspective, which includes socio-critical aspects and not only places knowledge-production in the hands of academic researchers but also emphasises the abilities and the importance of knowledge from experts of their own life-worlds. Participatory approaches are primarily concerned with the appreciation and support of a dynamic research process that is characterised by
flexibility and openness (Bergold and Thomas, 2010: 333; see also Von Unger, 2014: 1). Because of the different perspectives that need to be constantly integrated, it is necessary to keep in touch with each other through an eye-level dialogue that takes place on an equal footing between equal persons (Bergold and Thomas, 2010: 342). This means (ideally) consistently including all those involved and avoiding leaving any opinion unacknowledged. In particular, it includes research–ethical aspects, such as ensuring that specific power relations are not reproduced or that imbalances do not arise. This combination of varying aspects leads to responsibility being of the essence when conducting participatory research. Furthermore, participatory processes, in contrast to many other kinds of research, imply that “the co-production of knowledge hinges on relationality” (MacFarlane and Roche, 2018: 57; emphasis in original). In other words, participatory processes also imply that specific roles and identities – particularly present in traditional contexts of any knowledge production – may change, overlap, mix, or blur (MacFarlane and Roche, 2018: 57).

When developing the course in general (and its curriculum in particular) all these aspects were critically reflected upon and treated with the highest sensitivity (methodological possibilities and limitations were discussed, see Kremsner and Proyer, 2019). In addition, the research project accompanying the course was structured and designed in such a way as to account for the very individual interests of the course participants involved. In the course, when talking about the topic (re-)entry into the teaching profession and acclaiming (transnational) qualifications, but also in regular team and reflection discussions and meetings, negative topics such as barriers and challenges and (more rarely) positive themes such as opportunities, successes, and developments were repeatedly made the subject of discussion. Especially, the title of the Certificate Course sparked ongoing discussion, summarised in the quote used in the title of this article. Participants kept questioning the need for their refugee status being pulled into the centre of attention. Unfortunately, funding options were limited and due to high demand for this type of programme also for other groups of newcomers to Austria (e.g., from Eastern Europe), we had to pragmatically decide upon a specific focus.

This shows the importance and necessity to provide opportunities for exchange and joint reflection, but it also reminds us that the voices of teachers remain unheard: they are usually not asked to speak at all. Many of the teachers had had very few chances or simply no opportunity in the past to exchange experiences and verbalise their interests, needs, and wishes – they had rarely been given the chance to feel recognised and heard as fully-fledged teachers. On the basis of the explanations here given (and also in conclusion), the following questions were generated by the academic research team (by considering the interests of the participants, but not in joint development):

1. Which chances and developments do alumni of the course identify?
2. Which barriers and opportunities stem from the course, according to alumni?
3. How are the co-researchers’ accounts contextualised, or which stories are being shared throughout the assessment of the course?

These three questions aim to uncover challenges related to lacking acknowledgement and the need to be requalified and how alumni were dealing with this. Basically, the survey was carried out in two main stages: in a first step, data collection was carried out in December 2017 and in January 2018, by conducting individual interviews with five participants (see Table 1). This was undertaken by a person, who was already well known to the participants, but who later became a teacher on the course, which can be considered an issue, mainly because it reveals an inequality in the distribution of power: it simply cannot be denied that the role of a person teaching on the course is not on an equal level with that of a student. However, due to structural constraints, this was not entirely avoidable. In March 2018, two sets of group interviews were conducted, again by an external – but this time neutral – person. The second stage of the individual interviews took place in July...
Table 1. Overview of the data collected.

| Type of Interviews | Participants | Dates |
|--------------------|-------------|-------|
| 5 individual interviews | Lilian, Samer, Tom Hanks, Ghadi, Mohab  [names have been anonymised using pseudonyms chosen by the interviewees] | December 2017–January 2018 |
| 2 group interviews | 19 participants  [names were not anonymised; involved persons are called Person 1, Person A, etc.] | March 2018 |
| 5 individual interviews | Lilian, Samer, Tom Hanks, Ghadi, Mohab | July 2018 |

2018, conducted by the same person. All interviews were checked using communicative validation (e.g., Steinke, 2004).

Data were analysed using situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) – an approach that originates in grounded theory methodology, but connects with elements of discourse analysis. Its aim is to focus on the analysis of highly complex situations by mapping and illustrating their details. Applying a situational analysis approach is particularly fruitful in combination with participatory research, as it stems from a constructivist approach and therefore encourages researchers to consider their own personal experiences and points of view. Situational analysis uses three different kinds of maps, which were repeatedly produced and revised after the data were coded according to Charmaz (2014), as recommended by Clarke (2005):

1. situational maps serve as strategies for articulating the elements in a specific situation and examining the relations among them (Clarke, 2005: 86);
2. social-worlds/arenas maps are cartographies of collective commitments, relations, and sites of action (Clarke, 2005: 86); and
3. positional maps aim to simplify strategies for plotting the positions articulated and not articulated in discourses (Clarke, 2005: 86).

The available data were coded and partly analysed by applying situational maps in a workshop in spring 2018, together with thirteen participants who had volunteered to participate. A second workshop on data analysis – this time focusing on social worlds/arenas maps and positional maps – was planned for the summer of 2018, but failed to take place: former participants were busy finding jobs and restructuring their lives, which is why most of them were no longer available. The academic research team was confronted with the implications of participatory research, but as mentioned, it became quite necessary to combine different interests. The desire to successfully complete the research on a participatory level ran counter to the limited resources of participants. Against this backdrop, the outcomes were condensed in a model (see Figure 1), as also suggested by Clarke (2005), produced by the academic team only.

Findings: Layers of being and remaining a teacher

This section will describe the overall model developed (Figure 1) before taking a detailed look at the chronological passages (Figure 2).

Overview: From being a teacher to remaining or being a teacher again?

The complexity of the model (see Figure 1) was developed through continuous research and fuelled by ever-growing expertise from both researchers and co-researchers, and the interviewees’ different experiences and perspectives. It basically shows a continuum over time of
references to the need for requalification and associated necessary steps, and questioning of one’s own abilities.

Data were gathered in three phases and led to the identification of five main passages arranged along a timeline that played a role in the lives of the course participants, whose common goal was to work as teachers in Austria: (a) the (unknown) past; (b) between arrival and the start of the Certificate Course; (c) attendance of the course, with which the (d) chances of a job increased; and then (e) finding a job. Layer 1 describes the profession/work, layer 2 the discourses and political
dimension, and layer 3 the requalification. Figure 1 shows that layer 1 lacks consistency due to hindering aspects, as the profession/work was not an option at this point. Due to the logic of incomplete teacher training, professional non-recognition emerged. Layer 2 starts right after migration was forced and layer 3 is only valid for the time of the requalification programme.

These passages illustrate the ups and downs of the reported journeys of having been a teacher, being deprived of the possibility of becoming a teacher again, coming across an opportunity to become a teacher again, and in the end asking oneself whether it will be possible to ever become a teacher again or to remain a teacher in Austria. The chosen imagery resembles bumpy roads or repeated ascent of a steep mountain and aims to illustrate the many challenges and opportunities lining the path of the interviewees. The different periods cannot be strictly separated and the lengths and types of transitions between them vary. Nevertheless, the five main stations are characteristic orientation points summarising the reports of all interviewees. We next describe the main passages and their interrelatedness.

Interestingly, the time prior to migration (to Austria) was forced – the (unknown) past – is not directly addressed in the accounts but is referenced in relation to identification with the profession of teaching and how much experience and training interviewees had already acquired. The use of “ours” and “yours” during some of the interviews to delineate former and current cultural contexts and living conditions points to this period. Not making direct reference to the own past was a noticeable feature that left space for interpretation. Without knowing the reasons behind this remarkable silence, it might be hypothesised that the past was too painful a topic to bring up in an interview. Another interpretation might be that bringing up emotional memories – particularly those that hurt – is even harder when it has to be done in a foreign language (Plutzar, 2016). As the interview focused on teacher requalification and the course, perhaps the passage of actual forced migration was simply not seen as germane to the nature of the interviews.

The actual forced migration itself, as the passage between leaving one’s home and arriving in Austria, is not referred to in any of the interviews. The opposite is true for the subsequent period: that between arrival in Austria and joining the course. This phase is described in terms of plain stagnation, with the focus mainly on taking care of basic needs such as housing and food. Plutzar (2016) elaborates that these phases of initial arrival can be influenced by ongoing (or sequential trauma), meaning that bad experiences might be relived or new ones might ignite bad memories. This phase is also called “chronical limbo” (“chronische Vorläufigkeit”; Plutzar, 2016: 112), indicating that it more often than not takes a long time to find one’s way around the formalities of the new host country. One interviewee describes feeling like she had to start all over again: “[A]ll my dreams are shattered. I have to start from zero” (group interview 1, person 5, p. 9). During this phase, participants reportedly focused on acquiring German language skills and tried to access the job market, mostly without success or otherwise not in their area of expertise. In some cases, this phase lasted up to four years and led to large gaps in the participants’ curricula vitae. It lasted until they became aware of the possibility of attending the course that on first sight seemed to be tailored to their needs. The course is designed for those who need to perfect their German and perform well. In relation to the course, the political developments in Austria, media coverage, and formalist structures proved relevant throughout the analysis. Starting the course, participants reported immediate changes in their daily routines. This is especially due to the fact that parallel to this phase, chances of re-entering the teaching profession in Austria are anticipated. This phase has been identified as the most central, with different stages that will be elaborated later on in this section, as will the next and final phase: the actual process of finding a job. This phase is associated with issues such as (re-)identification with being a teacher but also recognition of this profession by others. In the following subsection, selected highly interrelated passages will be described further using actual accounts as illustrated in the additional aspects in regards to layers 2 and 3 (Figure 2).
Detailed accounts: Structures enabling and hindering the re-entry of internationally trained teachers into the Austrian job market

While not all aspects referred to in Figure 2 can be seen as either hindering or enabling, certain tendencies can nevertheless be discussed. Structural and policy-related limitations affect internationally trained teachers’ re-entry into the Austrian employment market, especially when arriving (phase after the forced migration/before attendance of the course) and after finishing the course (transition to finding a job). Political changes towards the conservative-right impacted media coverage of the course, and thus also influenced anticipations about job chances for the participants.

Arrival in Austria is referred to as gaining a clean slate, indicating the necessity of starting all over again. Not being able to perform a job they had held for many years proved frustrating for the participants, especially after learning that teachers of specific subjects were really sought after in Austria. The need to work hard to move on became more and more obvious, especially at the intersection with the central category, chances of re-entering the teaching profession in Austria. Work is considered to be meaning-making. A number of different aspects played a role in that regard: first, the prospect of getting back into teaching made some of the participants aware of how much time they had already spent waiting for their legal status to be updated; for acknowledgement of their documents; and to become at least to some degree able to speak and understand German, and – not least – of how much time they still needed to be fully acknowledged as teachers. This realisation was more than unsatisfying and even caused existential crises. Inactivity was considered a threat to psychological well-being. Participants were reminded of how vital employment was to them and the process of their integration. One of the participants, dubbed Samer, even went as far as saying that his experience of not being allowed to work had been “worse than war” (Samer, interview 2, p. 7). Second, attendance of the course initiated a possible transfer into active participation in the job market and was considered a chance to enter a new phase of the arrival process, a further step to becoming an integrated part of society and towards the end of dependency. Receiving a certificate from an Austrian university was thought to raise the chances of going back into one’s former profession and being acknowledged as a teacher in Austria. The course was considered a “good chance” (Mohab, interview 1, p. 14). Nevertheless, and third, the chance of gaining real access to the job market was always considered against the background of the risks caused by political changes or some sort of mistrust after years of waiting. In the context of questions related to gaining access to the teaching profession, the need to acquire (further) competences in theory and practice became obvious. Attending the course was negatively associated with pressure, mostly related to language-learning and the pressure to perform within extremely busy schedules. This was despite the fact that some of the participants had already been working as teachers for many years – for some it was (unsurprisingly) hard to understand why another time-consuming and intense academic education was mandatory. Language was considered both a hurdle to integration in general and more specifically to participating in the course, which requires high levels of (academic) language competencies.

The label “refugee teacher” affected the group. The name of the certificate was questioned and experiences of being “othered” throughout the course’s practical dimensions serve as two examples of hurdles. Maskos (2015) describes “othering” as a process of underlining the differences between groups characterised by deviations from the so-called “normal” or “normative.” Participants in the course experience(d) themselves as being “other,” for example, in terms of appearance, language, formal aspects such as having a “foreign” name, or in some cases wearing a hijab. This was also experienced during their internships, but became even more obvious when applying for a job. Thus, political discourses have reached the everyday life of all those people who – at least from a right-wing or conservative perspective – are no longer welcome. Mohab, for
example, reported that not all of the participants were welcomed and that atmosphere played a vital role in both the internship as well as in later work environments (Mohab, interview 2, p. 3); others said that they would never find a job, no matter how good they were as teachers, due to their wearing a hijab. These topics remained relevant at the stage of trying to find an actual job, when participants were hoping to identify as teachers again and experience a sense of belonging.

**Discussion of findings and conclusion**

Following the presented findings, it can be stated that internationally trained teachers, in particular those who have experienced forced migration, find themselves in a challenging situation: academically trained and acclaimed as teachers in their countries of origin, sometimes with decades of work experience, they are not being recognised, or at least not fully, despite the fact that there is a deficit of teachers in Austria. They find themselves in ongoing limbo between hoping for a re-entry into their profession and being held back by numerous administrative hurdles, language barriers, and lack of formal recognition. Being forced into a new country of residence often equals being forced into either a poorly paid auxiliary job or a series of further time-consuming and intense academic training programmes. With reference to Buber-Ennser et al. (2016) and Kohlenberger et al. (2017), this challenge applies not only to internationally trained teachers, but to all internationally educated academics. This points to the need to address broader underlying socio-political questions related to acclaiming or even welcoming transnational qualifications.

It also has to be stressed that our participatory approach turned out to be fruitful not only for the conceptualisation of the course, but also for the research findings. Questions such as “Who am I? Am I (already) a teacher (again) or will I ever again be one?” appeared right from the beginning of the participatory meetings, gained dominance during the whole process, and even sought their way to the surface when other issues were discussed.

As our research findings show, internationally trained teachers find themselves in a situation of not knowing who they are (professionally) anymore. Despite being formally approved, skilled, and academically trained teachers before their forced migration, their professional fate now lies in the hands of a highly bureaucratic apparatus in their new country of residence in formally acknowledging their expertise. The value and aesthetic of life-long learning (Schlögl, 2014) is harshly disrupted by a formal regime that devalues personal experiences and competences in a manner that becomes straining and fatal for the professional identify and role of teachers. The devastating impact for the professional role of teachers has also been shown in studies of COVID-19 pandemic school regulations and practises (Reischl and Schmölz, 2020). In both cases rules and regulations have shown to be inversive and intruding rather than securing and empowering.

It is therefore of utmost importance to reform regulatory processes of formal acknowledgement as well as of soft skills and teaching experience as soon as possible to value teachers’ professional experience and get them back in the job, particularly in a globalised world. Moreover, there is the need to establish a track towards formal acknowledgement of informally and non-formally acquired competences through formative and summative validation leading to formal qualification at the European level (Gugitscher and Schmidtke, 2018).

This is even more important when teachers in specific subjects (such as sciences and informatics) are currently desperately needed in Austria (Lassnigg et al., 2019). However, to do so would mean refraining from the currently dominant deficiency-oriented approach: formal acknowledgement processes of internationally acquired teacher education – even with slight differences depending on the subject – focus mainly on what is missing in a teacher’s qualification but do not consider the benefits or add-ons they possess, such as soft skills, experience, or even more extensive studies in a subject or subject-didactics. This was also reflected in their request to rename the
course: holding a certificate with the name “Basics in Education Studies for Displaced Teachers” reproduces “othering,” thus potentially provoking discrimination against them. They claim that they are first and foremost teachers, not refugees. Beside the name, the Certificate Course can be seen as one very crucial step back into the teaching job. However, it cannot be seen as a quick and easy solution.

Internationally trained teachers still have to complete the Austrian teacher training, which means that they have to study one subject (so as to have two teaching subjects) after the Certificate Course and then hold an Austrian bachelor’s degree in Teaching. A few years ago, Austrian Teacher Training Education was reformed into a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree. When secondary school teachers want to teach in more senior classes, a master’s degree is required, which implies (a) further studies of at least two years and/or (b) having to face yet another restriction. The future job perspective of alumni depends on various factors, among other things the (need for the) subject and individual engagement. However, apart from these already stated formal and individual aspects, alumni also face further structural problems that cannot be resolved by finishing the Certificate Course. Specific social (hierarchical) structures still exist, which have a decisive influence on which “fruits” the efforts of requalification programmes actually bear (in concrete terms: what results are achieved with regard to the individual goals of alumni?). At a meta-level, it is also necessary to think (courageously) about – of course without questioning the necessity of these programmes – the extent to which social–political barriers can be touched or overcome at all in this way.

While reform of acknowledgement processes is lacking, Austria should consider launching programmes such as this course – despite all negative aspects such as labelling/segregating the target group, not completely bridging the constructed gap of completed and recognised teacher training – to all teachers who have acquired their education abroad. Additionally, it would be fruitful to widen the target group to include all teachers, including those for primary (and even elementary) as well as higher and tertiary education.

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**Notes**

1. Ministry of Internal Affairs.
2. The self-given name of the target group discussed and determined in the participatory research process of the Erasmus + Project R/EQUAL is *internationally trained teachers*. Refugee teachers is still used in the discourse, yet the co-researchers saw this as labelling. The clarification *with a forced migration background* is used only in this chapter, in the abstract and in the keywords but not in the following article. For further strategy of arguments and terms used in the international literature, see Proyer et al. (2019b: 9).
3. Austrian teacher training consists of three pillars: subject one, subject two, and Basics in Education Studies.
4. Teacher training, for example, in most German federal states also consists of two subjects and pedagogical basics, making it easier to get recognition.

5. This article focuses on internationally trained teachers with a forced migration background. However, the phenomenon of de-qualification is a given fact for all teachers migrating to a country whose educational training differs from their own.

6. The term requalification is used to stress the existing teacher training and often years of teaching experience already completed by the teachers. The terms Certificate Course and postgraduate programme are used congruently.

7. For further information about results of the before-mentioned Erasmus+ Project R/EQUAL regarding (international) networking and exchanging of expertise in the field of higher education activities concerning (recently) immigrated and refugee teachers in Europe see: https://blog.hf.uni-koeln.de/immigrated-and-refugee-teachers-requal/ (accessed 2 September 2020).

8. Further details can be derived from the programme-website: https://www.uni-potsdam.de/de/zelb/refugee-teachers-program/programmueberblick.html (accessed 27 August 2020).

9. Website Certificate Course (available in German only): https://www.postgraduatecenter.at/weiterbildungsprogramme/bildung-soziales/bildungswissenschaftliche-grundlagen-fuer-lehrkraefte-mit-fluchthintergrund/ (accessed 27 August 2020).

10. Teachers who start teaching without having fully completed the three-pillar teacher training can do so with a so-called special contract. These contracts are short time and only valid for one year and holders cannot advance in the salary level over the years but have a fixed salary according to the special contract.

11. For further information of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) see: https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bc7b (accessed 27 August 2020).

12. Website Project CORE: https://www.refugees.wien/en/ (accessed 27 August 2020).

13. Interviews were conducted in German and transcribed with as little grammatical aberrations as possible. Literal translation into English has been tried.

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