Title: Learning to work: Does language proficiency influence immigrant students’ study choices in upper secondary schools in Norway and Sweden?

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Research areas: Interdisciplinary: School and Society; Second Language Learning and Reading and Writing outside of School.

Theoretical scope: Dornyei’s Language Learning Motivation (LLM) and Krashen’s Affective Filter Model both allude to the role motivation and attitudes can either contribute to or affect language learning. My sociolinguistic approach to this study is due to the nature of my hypothesis that immigrants shy away from general studies because of the amount of reading and writing which has to be done (in Norwegian). As such, CLIL in the Norwegian and Swedish school context is also taken into consideration (socioeducational model). In the new Norwegian curriculum LK2020 (which is currently being developed), there is focus on medborgerskap. TVET programmes are important in this, since working is a significant aspect of being part of society. Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach is reflected in the Norwegian school system. His Zone of Proximal Development can also show how these language learners, who mostly speak 3 or more languages, may view their own level of competency/potential. They are also learning two languages simultaneously (Norwegian and English). I am not focusing on reading and writing in themselves, but rather attitudes/motivation which can influence the immigrant language learner in choice of study. In other words, how reading and writing in a second/third language can discourage them from choosing general studies. Only about 20% of non-migrants choose general studies, whereas 80% choose vocational studies. Additionally, roughly half of those who choose general studies go on to drop out.

Methodology: This research is going to be conducted mostly qualitatively through text and data review on the topic and subject. Both countries have substantial data banks with statistics on immigrant literacy and employment/unemployment. I am also going to use questionnaires, interviews and/or observations, which I will conduct myself as much as possible. Two Upper Secondary Schools (one in Norway and another in Sweden) will provide the sample. Sample size is 40, combined.

Expected findings: Immigrant students choose vocational studies not only because they wish to work and sustain themselves and their families, but also (mainly?) because they shy away from the heavy amount of reading and writing which comes along with the theoretical General Studies Programmes.

Relevance: This is a small-scale research, which I hope to further develop into bigger research. If indeed reading and writing skills play a central role in study choices among immigrants, then policy makers, educators and academics in general can develop materials with this in mind. There are significant differences in levels of literacy and education between immigrants and non-immigrants in both countries. This research could possibly hint at why. Lastly, if indeed refugees are choosing jobs based not on their own interests and ambitions, this may affect their attitudes to work when they finish school. Although this
study does not investigate immigrants who are employed, this could be a future focus area for further research.