

Language policy concerning immigrants in Norway: How to meet unrealistic requirements and expectations?

May Olaug Horverak, Erik Brennsæter, Tone Marie Galteland, Torild Marie Olsen & Gro Renée Rambø
(Birkenes Learning Centre, Birkenes Learning Centre, Birkenes Learning Centre, University of Agder,
University of Agder)

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Immigrants in Norway have several rights and duties controlled by the Integration Act of 2020, which replaced the Introduction Act of 2003, and the goal is that they become independent financially and know the Norwegian language and how society works. Whereas the requirements of the previous law to gain citizenship was to learn to speak Norwegian at A2-level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the new law requires B1-level, or B2-level, depending on educational background. This implies that immigrants must be independent users of the Norwegian language, able to communicate about familiar topics and argue opinions on different issues. The previous requirement was that they were to understand and communicate simple, common expressions and manage routine conversations. With this change, which was contradicted by various organizations and spokespersons for the group in question, Norway has become one of the strictest countries in Europe concerning giving citizenship to immigrants. The research question being investigated is: How can adult learning centres in Norway support immigrants to reach their goals of learning the Norwegian language and becoming independent?

When arriving in Norway, many immigrants and refugees are quite optimistic about their situation and the support they receive. However, after struggling with learning the language for some time, and perhaps failing in finding a job, many of them may lose their motivation. From an adult learning perspective, to deal with a situation of unrealistic requirements and expectations, it is important to learn to cope, take one step at the time, and not give up. Five Norwegian adult learning centres have collaborated to develop methodology and strategies inspired by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), theory of self-regulation (Boekaerts & Niemivirta, 2005) and special needs education (Lovett et al., 2017), to deal with this situation and meet the needs of a diverse group of language learners. The teachers provide strategy training on a meta-cognitive level, supporting the immigrants to reflect on what is important for them to learn, and identify success factors and obstacles, as well as providing them with strategies to apply in the learning process. Experience reported through three workshops, including 70 teachers in total from the five schools, show that systematic strategy-training for different language levels combined with meta-reflection on the learning process, may support immigrants to deal with the stressful situation they are in, and aid them in becoming more independent learners of the language.

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