

# Teacher professionalism at a time of mobility: Positioning teachers in the language introduction programme in Sweden

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*This study aims to investigate how the educational and linguistic backgrounds of teachers affect how they are positioned and how they position themselves in relation to their profession in a language introduction programme at upper secondary school in Sweden. Material from two years of study at one school was used to conduct a nexus analysis. The material comprised policy documents at the national and local levels; interviews with principals and teachers; and classroom and school environment observations. Conflicting discourses appear in the analysis in terms of teacher competence and teacher roles. Those teachers who had the relevant professional competence, as according to national documents, felt that their knowledge was not acknowledged and that they were not listened to. Official documents state that principals are responsible for fulfilling stipulated demands; however, they do not always have the necessary knowledge as this is not a requirement for their position. Thus, an ambiguous picture appears where teachers who are positioned as competent at the national level are positioned only to teach their own subject and are not given voice on issues relating to general teacher competence and organisation of education at the local level. This article highlights the importance of knowledge and understanding relating to L2 student learning at the management level.*

**Keywords:** language introduction programme, recently arrived migrants, positioning, teacher professionalism

## 1 Introduction

Increasing mobility in contemporary processes of globalisation is affecting conditions for education and learning in schools. Attention has been directed to the challenges facing students for whom the medium of instruction is a second language (L2) that they recently started to learn, and research such as that by Lavery et al. (2019) from the US shows that teacher education rarely prepares teacher students for this situation. The Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE) (2016b) highlights the issue of teachers' lack of competence in terms of teaching students with a migrant background. A study of course syllabi from teacher education in Sweden (Hermansson et al., 2021) showed variations between teacher categories on the issue of if and how they were prepared for the

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teaching of L2 students. Cummins (2000) and García (2009), among others, stress how important it is that all teachers understand the relationship between the development of knowledge and language. Gibbons (2006) and Baker (2001) highlight how all teachers need to know about student learning in an L2 that the student has not yet mastered. Baker (2001) also stresses the importance of having teachers who are educated in L2 acquisition. Another point of importance highlighted by, for example, García (2009) and Baker (2001) is that of supporting students' prior languages.

The question of teacher competence is a question of equity and equal right to education. In this study, interest is on teachers in the language introduction programme (LIP) in upper secondary school in Sweden to which students who come to Sweden as adolescents and who do not qualify for national programmes at upper secondary school are admitted. The intention with LIP is that students are taught Swedish as a Second Language (SSL) and other school subjects so that they can meet national programme entry requirements. According to the Education Act (SFS 2010:800), they have the right to what is called Mother Tongue Tuition (MTT) and Study Guidance through the Mother Tongue (SGMT). Education is supposed to be planned according to the individual while following careful mapping procedures; furthermore, SGMT is supposed to provide students with support in a language (not Swedish) that they master (SNAE 2011, 5 chap. § 4). For some of the students, not meeting requirements before the age of 19 may mean that they are denied asylum, while others may try to find a job or are referred to the adult education.

Research and reports highlight several challenges and problems with the programme. In their research, Sharif (2017) and Bomström Aho (2018) show how students' prior experience and knowledge are not sufficiently attended to, something that is also found by SNAE (2016b). Organisational problems such as spatial and social borders that limit student mobility through the education system are made apparent by Hagström (2018), Wedin (2021) and SNAE (2016b). Research by the Hermansson et al. (2021) highlights discrepancies in teacher competence regarding the teaching of L2-students. In addition, SNAE (2016b, 2019) and the School Inspectorate (2017a) report that LIP teachers do not give students the support and guidance they require and that students' educational needs are not met. Furthermore, Skowronski (2013) and Sharif (2017) show that despite students having different backgrounds, they are often treated homogeneously. According to Bjuhr (2019), decisions on students' education are often made without the involvement of the students themselves.

This study is part of a larger research project focusing on students' language development, disciplinary literacy and social inclusion in LIP<sup>1</sup>, and the aim here is to study how the educational and linguistic background of teachers affects how they are positioned and position themselves in relation to their profession. The following research questions were used in the analysis:

- 1) In which ways are teachers and SGMT assistants positioned by official documents and the local management?
- 2) In which ways do teachers position themselves and each other?
- 3) In which ways are the different discourses related to each other?

Nexus analysis was used because it is a form of discourse analysis that enables a multidimensional analysis of a complex system, such as the positioning of teachers. Through nexus analysis, as a scalar ethnography used in educational

linguistics (Scollon & Scollon, 2004; Hult, 2017), cycles of discourses may be analysed to create understanding of the shaping and usage of different discourses. Thus, knowledge that is important for creating equal educational opportunities for recently arrived adolescents in school, and for introductory and transitional programmes is created.

## 2 Theory

This study is in line with the research by both Foucault (1993), who understands discourses as being dynamic, negotiated and transformed through interaction, and Butler (1997, 2005; see also Hacking, 2000), who perceives discourse as being produced and performed through actions in everyday life, and through repetition that creates norms and categories such as “natural” and “common sense”. The concept *positioning* (Davies & Harré, 1990) is used to illuminate how discourses construct frames for identity work. Inside these frames, individuals may be positioned as included in certain categories, such as L2-student, subject teacher and SSL-teacher. This means that individuals are perceived as active agents in the identity work taking place in discursive practices (Harré et al., 1998).

Position theory (Davies & Van Langenhove, 1999) is used here to study how different discourses construct frames for the understanding of professional roles, including issues of *voice* and *agency*. People negotiate and transform identities by being positioned and positioning themselves in relation to others. The individual needs to face these categorisations in one way or another, by resisting, challenging, claiming or maintaining ascribed positions (Hacking, 2000; Hjørne & Säljö, 2009; Hult, 2015; Wedin, 2020). As the focus here is on the professional role of teacher, the institutional perspective is important as agents are ascribed certain positions and space for action through the school as an institution.

The use of nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, Määttä & Pietiäinen, 2014; Hult, 2015; Pietikäinen, 2018) as the analytical framework enables an analysis of relationships between levels and scales and is thus particularly relevant for the study of a multidimensional social phenomenon such as the positioning of teachers in LIP. In nexus analysis, the nodal point is the social action, studied through the wider sociohistorical discourses included as intersecting specific social actions. The framing of the intersection has three dimensions: a) discourses in place, b) historical bodies and c) interaction order. With *discourses in place*, discourses that are relevant and foregrounded in the focused unit of social action are illuminated. These constitute norms that guide individuals in their interaction and expectations of each other. With discourses in place, there is an analysis of social positions which are created for some actions but not for others, depending on the other participants (Hult, 2017). *Historical bodies*, derived from the concept by Nishida (1998), illuminates experiences of individuals and institutions. As analytical tools, historical bodies, which are dynamic and change over time, provide important analytical tools together with position theory (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). In educational settings, issues of prior training and linguistic experiences are relevant for how individuals engage in the action. *Interaction order*, which was developed by Goffman (1993), constitutes behaviour upon the creation of relationships through social action. It actualises issues such as shared norms that guide social interaction and social positioning in relation to space for certain kinds of actions.

By way of the multi-dimensionality of nexus analysis, the conceptual relevance of scales is highlighted (Hult, 2015, 2017). Because it allows for the integration of multiple methods, it is useful in an analysis of a complex feature such as the positioning of teachers. This is particularly valuable as it enables the study of what takes place in real time in relation to layers of historicity, “some of which are within the grasp of the participants while others remain invisible but are nevertheless present” (Blommaert, 2005: 130).

In an analysis of the positioning of teachers, issues of voice and agency are important. *Voice* is here used to refer to who gets to talk and who is listened to (see for example Cook-Sather, 2006), while *agency* is understood in a dialogic perspective (Ahearn, 2001; Dufva & Aro, 2015) in accordance with Ahearn’s definition: “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112, see also Vitanova et al., 2015). This means that agency is treated as being fluid and dynamic and developed in social action. Thus, voice and agency are understood as relating to issues of power, which allows for an analysis of aspects of power in the interdependent and complex nature of interactions between individuals, institutions and communities (Wedin, 2019, 2020).

### 3 Methods

The larger project, of which this study is a part, used linguistic ethnography (Copland & Creese, 2015; Martin-Jones & Martin, 2017) as the methodological framework. The material used here was created over two school years at Cherry School, an upper secondary school in Sweden. It was the only school in a mid-sized town to offer LIP. Material used here was developed using observations, interviews and official documents. Material from classroom observations (63 hours) consists of field notes, audio and video recordings, and photographs. As well, about 150 hours of observations in other physical areas in the school was included, documented by field notes and photographs of displayed objects, images and written texts. Interviews were conducted with teachers (N=13) and three principals<sup>2</sup>. Policy documents at the national level that were used were curricula and SNAE documents, and at the local level, a document on language policy was used.

As a first step, the three dimensions of nexus analysis were framed as follows:

- a) discourses in place (national and local policy documents, and interviews with principals)
- b) historical bodies (interviews with teachers)
- c) interaction order (observations from classrooms and the school environment)

The material was analysed thematically to explore issues relating to the positioning of teachers. Special attention was paid to issues of voice and agency. In the second step, the nexus of circulating discourses was used to answer the research questions. This was then used to analyse the positioning of the teachers.

Ethical considerations were important throughout the study to ensure that nobody was harmed and that data was stored securely in accordance with the project data storage plan. Here, data is presented in such a way so as to avoid the recognisability of participants, and pseudonyms are used.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Discourses in place

The analysis of discourses that constitute norms guiding individuals in interaction as well as their expectations of each other is conducted based on policy documents at the national and local level together with interviews with principals.

Teachers are generally not particularly visible in national policy documents relating to LIP, such as the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and the curriculum (SNAE 2011, ch. 1 and 2). Main responsibility lies with “the school<sup>3</sup>” and principals to “give immigrant youth who recently arrived to Sweden an education with an emphasis on the Swedish language, which makes their continued studies in upper secondary school or another education possible” (SFS 2010:800, 17 ch. § 3), see also 1 ch. §§ 8–9). Also in (SNAE 2008), the responsibility is placed on the school to ensure the adequacy of education and on the principal specifically to analyse needs and to report these to the individual governing body for each school (see also SFS 2010:800, 17 ch. § 14 a). Teachers are positioned as possibly needing in-service training to work with recently arrived students (SNAE 2008, 2016a), where their responsibility is to collaborate with other personnel and to communicate with the student and his or her caregiver. The need for competent L2-teachers is raised in support material (SNAE 2013) and reports (SNAE 2016b), as well as how subject teachers in LIP require knowledge about L2-learning and language development approaches in their subjects. Also raised are certain challenges teachers face, (SNAE 2016b) such as competence assessment, adaptation of educational content to meet the individual needs of, for example, students with little prior education and students who arrive in adolescence. According to SNAE (2016a), teachers, together with principals and other staff, are also expected to organise, plan and deliver education while exchanging knowledge and experience.

In a report on LIP by the School Inspectorate (2017a), teachers are praised for the care and attention they show students while the report raises the problem of there being low expectations and a lack of confidence in the ability of students as well as the fact that in many schools, too much focus is on the perceived weaknesses of students. The report states there to be a general discourse among staff that students set too high goals for themselves and overestimate their educational level. The report also raises the issue of a lack of competent teachers.

At the local school level, a local plan and interviews with three principals were used. At the start of the study, two principals (P1 and P2) were responsible for LIP. After one year, P1 moved on to another position in the municipality and a third principal (P3) was hired, and as a result of a decreasing number of students in LIP, P3 remained as the sole principal for LIP from the fourth semester. The three principals were thus interviewed at different stages of the two-year study: P1 at the beginning and P3 at the end. While P1 and P3 held teaching degrees, P2 had no teaching degree.

At the beginning of the observation period, the school had no written policy or plan for LIP: it only had what was termed “Crib for LIP – From A to Ö”<sup>4</sup>. After an inspection by the School Inspectorate, the school was informed of the requirements from SNAE to have a written plan. Consequently, one of the principals, P1, was given the responsibility to draw up such a plan, which was named “Plan for the Introduction Programme 2018–2019”, and this only became available in the third

semester of the study (autumn 2019). This plan was for all introduction programmes at the school, and the part about LIP was only about one-page long. Teachers are mentioned twice in the text, first as having responsibility to transfer information from the initial mapping of students and second as being subject teachers who as a result of the mapping receive good support.

In the interviews about the school and the education it provides, the principals barely talked about the teachers or their professional competence. When they did mention teachers, they did not distinguish between the diverse roles of teachers and SGMT assistants; nor did they distinguish between different categories of teachers, such as SSL-teachers, subject teachers and MTT teachers. P1 stated, “I have mother tongue teachers” in reference to SGMT assistants. When asked whether they were certified, she said that she did not know. In Sweden, MTT teachers may, but do not have to, hold a teaching degree, whereas there is no certificate for SGMT assistants. P2 said that he was happy to have hired a teacher of Tigrinya, referring to an SGMT assistant. When P3 talked about SGMT assistants, she referred to them as “reception teachers – I might say Mother Tongue Tuition teachers. This is what they’re called on paper, but here they also work with a reception group, those who are most new with us”.

In their interviews, the principals did not mention the lack of professional competence of teachers – for example, knowledge about language development in various subjects. Only P3, who was hired during the process of the inspection, mentioned that there was a need for in-service training and that all teachers need to learn how to “build students’ Swedish”.

By way of discourses in place, a discrepancy is revealed regarding teachers between policy documents at the national level and the plan and principals’ thoughts at the local level. While the national level highlights the need for teacher competence relating to education for recently arrived students, the local level pays little attention to teachers’ competence, analysis of competence needs or reports to the individual governing body for each school. In particular, the lack of awareness of differences between teachers and SGMT assistants is striking. Official documents express the need for subject teachers to have knowledge about L2-learning and language development approaches in their subjects, yet this is barely reflected at the local management level.

#### *4.2 Historical bodies*

In terms of historical bodies, issues relating to teachers’ prior training and linguistic experience are the focus in an analysis of how teachers as individuals engage in the social action in which teachers are positioned. The 13 teachers were interviewed individually, with each interview lasting 25 –70 minutes (see table 1). Nine had a Swedish teaching degree, while two had higher education and attained their teaching degree during the duration of the project. Two were hired as SGMT assistants but at points during the project worked as teachers of mainly students who were the most recently arrived. Seven of the interviewed teachers were SSL-teachers, while others taught Mathematics, Natural Sciences, English, Physical Education and Social Studies. In Sweden, the Natural Sciences refer to Chemistry, Biology and Physics, and Social Studies to Geography, History, Religion and Civics. Of the SSL-teachers, three had completed 90 ECTS in SSL, one had completed 60 ECTS and three had completed 30 ECTS. To teach at upper secondary school, teachers in Sweden require 90 ECTS but for LIP, the requirement is 45 ECTS.

**Table 1.** Interviewed teachers.

Teacher's name	Appointed as teacher of	Qualifications
<b>Hella</b>	SSL	SSL 90 ECTS
<b>Maria</b>	Mathematics and Natural Sciences	Mathematics, Natural Sciences for lower sec. school
<b>Abdi</b>	SGMT/Mathematics and Social Studies	Engineer
<b>James</b>	Social Studies	Social Studies for upper sec. school
<b>Ellen</b>	SSL	SSL 90 ECTS
<b>Bertil</b>	Geography	PE and Mathematics
<b>Christina</b>	SSL/Social Studies	SSL 30 ECTS, Social Studies for lower sec. school
<b>Eva</b>	SSL	SSL 30 ECTS, Swedish, SSL and English for lower sec. school
<b>Khaled</b>	Mathematics	Mathematics and Natural Sciences
<b>Astrid</b>	SSL	SSL 30 ECTS
<b>Annie</b>	SSL	SSL 60 ECTS, Swedish and Social Studies, primary school
<b>Ulla</b>	SSL	SSL 90 ECTS, Swedish, Religion for upper sec. school
<b>Barzan</b>	SGMT and Mathematics	Bachelor's degree in Physics

Teachers of SSL are educated in multilingualism, L2-development and the teaching of students using their L2. One of the SSL-teachers, Christina, was also appointed to teach Social Studies because she was a trained teacher of both. Of the four trained teachers who did not have SSL training, Maria and Khaled claimed to have studied something related to multilingualism while taking their teacher education programme, while Bertil mentioned taking part in seminars led by one of the SSL-teachers, Hella. James said that he had asked for in-service training but that nothing had happened. Three of them, James, Bertil and Khaled, had themselves been L2-students: James and Khaled as immigrants in Sweden and Bertil as a student in the USA. Furthermore, one of the SSL-teachers, Ellen, had spent several years in another country and studied at university in an L2. None of the teachers in other subjects than SSL expressed a need or wish to learn more about education for L2-students or multilingualism.

The two unqualified teachers we interviewed, Abdi and Barzan, were employed as SGMT assistants but worked part-time as teachers. Abdi had studied industrial engineering in his home country and explained that he had studied Somali, Arabic and Italian at university. He now taught English and Social Studies. Barzan had a Bachelor's degree in Physics from one of the countries where he had previously lived. He held a degree in Arabic as a Second Language, and while the project was underway, he taught Mathematics for one semester to the most recently arrived students.

During the interviews, SGMT assistants and MTT teachers were a point of discussion. Within the municipality, the organisation of MTT teachers was separate from LIP, and none of the teachers claimed to work with them. Two SSL-teachers complained that the principals did not prioritise MTT and that the organisation of MTT was weak: indeed, Ellen described it as chaos, saying: "There are students who haven't even been allowed to start". Moreover, two of the subject teachers, Maria and Khaled, talked about how they collaborated with SGMT assistants, but Bertil complained that some did not know enough Swedish and James said that some did not know "their place, their roles" and that they "only quickly interpret".

Teachers complained about a lack of support from management. SSL-teachers in particular claimed to have argued for the inclusion of students' various languages in class and talked about the lack of competence among other subject teachers about language development approaches in their subjects, referring to research and their own education. They complained that their knowledge and opinions went unnoticed by principals and subject teachers. Astrid said "it's this to have a school management who doesn't know how this works (...) and many colleagues think that they can only be subject teachers". Hella called for management that gives clear orders and that makes sure that all teachers learn something about multilingualism. She complained that "we try, I give suggestions all the time" but said that when several teachers had wanted to attend a conference on the subject in Stockholm, a principal attended instead. James complained about a general lack of guidelines and action plan, and about how he as a qualified upper secondary school teacher now had to teach lower grades and, as such, topics he was not trained to teach.

In terms of collaboration between teachers, Abdi mentioned a lack of time. Only one case of collaboration between SSL-teachers and teachers of other subjects was mentioned: this was a small-scale project that involved a technology teacher and two SSL-teachers. One SGM assistant, Barzan, said that he had created word lists in various languages for some subjects but that few teachers had shown interest in them.

Hella was the only one who mentioned the generally low competency level of teachers. She argued for the importance of a high level of competence among SSL-teachers, and that the management argued that "it's enough with 30 ECTS (...) I think that's a catastrophe. That's a catastrophe. That's not much." Similar to Ellen, she also argued about how important it was for subject teachers to learn about language development approaches, while referring to another school where she had once worked and where she had been assigned to train subject teachers about multilingualism: "there I had such a function this language development education. They became very interested. Here we have tried the same but here it never becomes anything." Ellen said that colleagues discussed these topics but principals did not listen to them: "It still feels like multilingualism, generally speaking (...) at management level, is not permitted the place it should be permitted to take. You could say that it is made invisible." Meanwhile, Hella stated that, "you need to have a management that listens, understands and sort of actually give orders (...) it's like banging your head against a brick wall" in reference to her quest for change. Several teachers talked about problems relating to students not being allowed to continue through the school system, and Astrid, another SSL-teacher, complained about not being listened to by management when she argued for ways in which students could meet the requirements for some subjects, such as English and Mathematics, so that they could progress to take courses at the upper secondary school level.

The historical bodies of teachers that become apparent in what is said, paints a picture of how teachers engage in the action. Contrary to the principals yet similar to national-level documents, teachers positioned themselves and others in relation to competence. While SSL-teachers stressed the need for all teachers to learn about multilingualism and language development, the four other qualified subject teachers did not express such a need. Only James mentioned the need for courses; however, he did not specify what types. Among the latter group, some complained about the low level of responsibility and engagement among students



as well as the weaknesses of SGMT assistants. Teachers talked explicitly about the different roles of SGMT assistants, MTT teachers, SSL-teachers and subject teachers. More or less all described how their voices went unheard, with some expressing frustration about their knowledge not being put into use. This was particularly the case with the most educated SSL-teachers, who positioned themselves as competent, by referring to research and their own education. At the same time, they complained about being positioned as not having a voice or agency beyond their own teaching. Regarding collaboration between teacher groups, which official documents highlight as important, teachers mentioned collaboration with SGMT assistants but referred to organisational problems as the reason why they did not collaborate with MTT teachers.

### 4.3 Interaction order

The analysis of interaction order as behaviour that creates relationships through social action builds on classroom observations of classrooms (63 hours) and the school environment (about 150 hours). Eleven of the interviewed teachers were observed, as were four more teachers (see table 2). The material (field notes, transcripts, photographs and video recordings) was analysed to identify patterns of social interaction that indicate certain kinds of actions, with a focus on (teacher) agency and voice.

The lack of collaboration that teachers talk about is visible in the physical school space. Different groups of teachers or SGMT assistants spend their time out of class in small staff rooms, about 3-5 in each, and the rooms are located a distance from each other. There is a common area in the middle of the school where students and staff sit during breaks, with coffee and snacks from the small coffee shop. Usually staff and teachers from LIP meet and chat in this area. Principals were never observed sitting here. In the school, LIP is located in a separate part, and staff and students from LIP were seldom seen to mix with those from other programmes in the school here. The atmosphere in this common area was relaxed.

There was a significant difference in interaction patterns between the observed SSL-lessons and the lessons in other subjects. Thus analysis will be carried out starting with the other subjects followed by SSL-classes.

**Table 2.** Classroom teachers who were observed for the study.

Teacher	Appointed as teacher of	Observations	Had studied using an L2	Immigrant in Sweden
Hella	SSL	3		
Maria	Ma/Natural Sciences	19		
Abdi	SGMT/Ma, Social Studies	1	x	x
James	Social Studies	6	x	x
Ellen	SSL	3	x	
Bertil	Geography	1	x	
Christina	SSL/Social Studies	2 (in SS)		
Khaled	Ma/Natural Sciences	7	x	x
Astrid	SSL	1		
Annie	SSL	11		
Barzan	SGMT/Ma	1	x	x
Lena	SSL	1		
Xoriyo	SGMT/Ma	3	x	x
Petra	SSL	3		
Karin	Fine Arts	1		

In other subjects than SSL, some of the students had already studied the subject at a higher level, even at university level, while some either were taking the subject for the first time or had little or no prior schooling. None of the students had passed the course in SSL, which is a prerequisite to mainstream programmes at upper secondary school. Some students planned to enter higher education and to do so they needed Swedish language skills that were subject specific.

Common to all observed lessons in these subjects was a pattern of a short, introductory instruction by the teacher, followed by individual student work. The teachers used different strategies to handle the challenging situation. Here three are selected who were trained to teach the subject they taught and were observed in several lessons: Maria in Mathematics and Natural Sciences, James in Social Studies and Khaled in Mathematics.

Maria, who did not have a migrant background, claimed in her interview to be equally interested in both language and her subjects. She was observed during 19 lessons in both Mathematics and Natural Sciences. In her teaching, two interaction patterns were dominant: teacher-led introductory presentation and individual student work. The presentations were short (5–9 min) and included very little interaction with students. For example, she did not generally ask students if they had understood, and students seldom asked for clarification. The presentations, the students' individual work and the assessment focused on central concepts: for example, in a lesson on healthy food, focus was on *fats, carbohydrates, proteins, water, vitamins* and *minerals*. Students had access to simplified versions of the textbook and to the internet on laptops, which gave them access to software such as reading services with translations of the textbook and instructional films with oral and written translations. Some students also used their personal mobile phones. In some lessons, an SGMT assistant walked around to help students. Maria seldom involved herself in the multilingual interactions between students and SGMT assistants.

Social Studies teacher James, who himself had immigrated to Sweden, was observed during six lessons in History and Civics. Like Maria, James seldom interacted with SGMT assistants or involved himself in students' individual work. He mainly had students work individually on exercises. Some lessons he started with a teacher-led presentation and as in the previous class, there was little discussion between him and the students: the teacher did not ask students about their understanding and the students seldom asked questions. The exercises demanded that students read the textbook and write their answers. In some lessons, he presented central Civics concepts such as *conservative, democracy, liberal* and *legislation*. Students had access to similar tools as they did in Natural Sciences and used various strategies for their work. While Maria kept the study group together and gave all students tests at the same time, James arranged the work more individually and gave individual students a test at a time he found suitable. He frequently advised students about their studies with such comments as "take responsibility"; "it's your responsibility"; "you should read to learn"; and "you have to understand its meaning". However, he did not appear to expect a response to these comments. As in Maria's lessons, there was generally little teacher-student talk. Students spoke and initiated dialogue, such as a female student who suggested that she explain something to the Somali-speaking students in Somali. James's answer to that suggestion was, "But how will I know that you've understood? You have to explain". Then he continued to present other topics in Swedish while the student gave her explanation to her peers in Somali. Both the

teacher and the student appeared not to notice and paid no regard to what the other had said. Another example of student initiative that went unnoticed by the teachers was when one student started singing in a lesson, and his peers reacted positively.

Khaled too had an immigrant background, and he qualified in Sweden as a teacher of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the end of the period of observations. He was observed during seven lessons in Mathematics. His lessons also featured two main types of interaction: first an introductory presentation and then group or individual work. Khaled frequently used the languages he knew and involved the SGMT assistants when they were present in his interaction with students. In the presentations, he gathered the students he had selected for the planned presentation while the others worked on their exercises. In his presentations, he employed various modalities, such as oral and written presentations, mathematics materials, physical gestures and demonstrations with clothing. He anchored knowledge in everyday language and thinking by employing mathematical expressions to start and conclude his explanations. One example was when teaching the topic “the equation of a line”, Khaled started by writing an equation and drawing its representation as a graph on the whiteboard. He explained in Swedish and Farsi, as some students were Dari-speaking and understood Farsi. He also gave room for the assistant to explain in Somali and Arabic to other students. He explained in Swedish ‘Linjen skär y-axeln’ (the line cuts the y-axis). Then one student commented “Sometimes in Dari it means donkey”. Khaled laughed and said that it was true: ‘خر’ is pronounced like the Swedish “skär” or the English “share”, and this means donkey in both Dari and Farsi. He made sure everyone had understood before returning to the equation and the graph on the whiteboard, after which he asked students to work on assigned pages in their books. While students worked, he, like the assistant, walked around to help students. In a lesson on the decimal system, he used the same strategy: he began by writing numbers on the whiteboard and pronouncing their number-name; he then used artifacts such as magnetic figures and fake money that students arranged on the table and on the whiteboard before next returning to the numbers and what they were called in Swedish. In all lessons, Khaled frequently asked if students had understood and checked with SGMT assistants when necessary.

The interaction patterns in these classes were similar in that they began with instructions that were followed by students working on exercises, mainly individually. With the exception of Khaled’s classes, the dialogue between teachers and students was limited, with the teacher explaining in Swedish and students working individually with their translation tools, sometimes with help from SGMT assistants. Only Khaled involved himself in the translanguaging practices between students and assistants.

The 22 observed lessons in six SSL-teachers’ classrooms included more varied interaction patterns between different lessons and more dialogue between teachers and students. On occasion, SSL-teachers started the lesson with a teacher-led presentation, but that was not always the case. Lessons included a variety of activities, which resulted in various interaction patterns. Examples of activities are:

- working on a text in consecutive lessons while the teacher walks around and helps students with, for example, content, grammar, structure and spelling

- following up on earlier work: for example, writing a letter or a review
- reading various types of texts followed by discussion about their specific characteristics
- watching a film, followed by discussion about themes it raised
- reading in groups, followed by discussion with one student as chairperson and one as secretary
- describing, in groups, a person
- analysing written and oral language for grammar
- in groups according to their strongest language read and write about popular music artists, followed by whole-class reading of the texts students had written and discussion about grammatical features
- interviewing each other in pairs, acting as journalists, followed by writing and talking about the outcome of their interviews
- working with grammar exercises
- discussing characteristics of various types of texts and relating these to each other

Students used different languages and digital media also in these classes while helping each other, but in contrast to most of the other subject teachers, all SSL-teachers involved themselves in dialogue with the students in their lessons, mainly using Swedish. There was great variation between individual SSL-teachers' teaching styles, but when compared with the lessons of other subject teachers, these SSL-teachers structured lessons in such a way that the patterns of interaction were much more varied.

The analysis of the order of interaction revealed variation in patterns of social interaction in the SSL-classrooms and the classrooms of other subjects. Teachers positioned themselves in two main ways; either as 1) relatively withdrawn while giving students the main responsibility for their learning or 2) as negotiators, to one extent or another, of knowledge while using various linguistic resources, including various patterns of interaction. In the classrooms of some subject teachers, the interaction may be viewed as quite stereotypical. In the SSL-classes and in two of the Mathematics classes (with Khaled and Barzan), various linguistic resources were used, and the teachers had discussions with students. Both Khaled and Barzan had worked as SGMT assistants and mastered several of the languages that students used, while no SSL-teacher knew more than a few phrases in those languages, which may be one reason why only Khaled and Barzan themselves used varied languages.

## **5 Analysis of circulating discourses**

The circulating discourses will be used to respond to the research questions. In terms of how teachers are positioned in official documents and by management on the local level, contradictions became apparent regarding teacher competence. On the one hand, official national documents emphasise the need for teachers to have knowledge about L2-learning and language development in their subjects; however, local documents and principals P1 and P2 did not mention the need of this knowledge, and P3 only upon receiving the explicit question. Teacher positioned themselves and their colleagues according to competence, such as having enough education or not. Among the SSL-teachers, those with higher education in SSL placed greater demands on what makes for a competent SSL-

teacher and most SSL-teachers mentioned the need for knowledge about L2-students and their learning among all teachers. None of the other subject teachers mentioned such needs. Furthermore, it was the two teachers with the most education in SSL who were the strongest advocates of organisational change.

There was also a contradiction concerning responsibility for educational quality. While official national documents and SSL-teachers positioned principals as responsible for ensuring a sound learning environment for students, the principals and other subject teachers positioned students as responsible for their learning. A further contradiction exists between the main objective of LIP, as stipulated in policy documents, which is to develop students' Swedish, and the appointment at the local school level of teachers who do not have the relevant training – particularly when it comes to position SGMT assistants without teacher education as teachers for the most recently arrived students.

The teaching style of some teachers who had no training in teaching L2-students was very stereotypical, with little dialogue. Perhaps the reason for this was that they positioned themselves according to what they perceived was possible in a situation for which they had no training. The type of teaching that was observed – short presentations without dialogue with students working mostly on their own – is not how teachers are trained to teach. They had been educated to teach students who already know Swedish, and the type of teaching practices observed were not in line with good teaching practices: teaching was minimal, as was follow-up of students' understanding. This is supported by the fact that it was also some of these teachers who complained that students did not take responsibility for their studies and who talked about deficiencies among SGMT assistants, thus positioning them as not competent in their work assignment. As James said, he was a qualified upper secondary school teacher but now taught content at lower secondary school: he was not trained to teach such content, nor to teach students who did not know Swedish. By focusing on individual concepts, Maria did not teach either Science or Mathematics in a way that helped students increase their knowledge or the language they needed to express that knowledge.

The positioning of teachers in categories, such as subject teacher and SSL-teacher, relates to their education. In this case, the education of teachers varied, with some having no teacher education or not in the subject they were appointed to teach. The only teachers who had training in L2-development and language development approaches in other subjects were SSL-teachers. Only one of the principals, P3, had some training in L2-student education, and she was also the only principal to mention the need for such skills among teachers. However, she did not distinguish between teachers and SGMT assistants, and she herself appointed an assistant who had no higher education, Xoriyo, to teach Mathematics and another, Abdi, who had no teacher training nor Swedish education to teach Social Studies. Here it should be made clear that Social Studies is a subject in the curriculum in which Swedish content dominates, since it builds on Swedish history, geography, religion and civics. Thus, conflicting competence demands become apparent in the circulating discourses, with some teachers being appointed to teach subjects for which they are not qualified.

Principals do not distinguish clearly between MTT teachers and SGMT assistants, two categories that go unmentioned in local documents, whereas national policy documents state the rights students have to MTT and to support from SGMT. This distinction, however, appeared clear among the teachers. There

would therefore appear to be a contradiction in how principals perceive their role regarding teacher competence and how different teacher categories position themselves and perceive the competence of others.

The low level of collaboration between staff when it came to roles and positions may be viewed as an issue of management; however, there is a notion of fixed borders between each category, with little space, either room or time, for the level of collaboration stipulated in national policy documents. While SSL-teachers referred to research and their own education in their requests for collaboration and increased competence among colleagues, they complained that these requests went unheard by management. This makes clear an ambiguity, where those who are positioned with the responsibility to ensure that given directives are followed – that is to say, the principals – did not have the competence to do so, while those who did have the competence to do so – the SSL-teachers – were not positioned to.

The circulation of discourses also reveals the relationship between teachers' linguistic backgrounds and their roles and perceptions on professionalism. Many of the teachers had themselves studied in an L2-context. This may be a coincidence but also a result of conscious choices made by the teachers or others in the job application and selection process. Of the five teachers who had themselves immigrated to Sweden, three positioned themselves as multilingual by employing various linguistic resources in their classes, while the other two positioned themselves as speakers of Swedish. The teachers with a Swedish background who had studied in an L2-context in another country, Ellen and Bertil, expressed their understanding of the challenges faced by students, as did other SSL-teachers, which may not be surprising since this is part of their own education.

## 6 Discussion

Through the circulating discourses of the nexus analysis, an ambiguous image appears in relation to how teachers are positioned in their profession in LIP and in terms of their education and linguistic background. There are clear discrepancies between official documents and SSL-teachers on the one hand, and principals and other subject teachers on the other. Above all, these discrepancies concern what knowledge teachers must have and responsibility for educational quality; they also concern the organisation of education and the opportunities students have to progress through the system. Teachers who are positioned as competent in national documents are, at the local level, only positioned to teach their own subject and are not given a say on issues of teacher competence and organisation of education. As Hella states, "it's like banging your head against a brick wall". At the same time, those who at the local level are positioned to ensure educational quality and to organise education – namely, the principals – have lower demands than the regulations. This leads to positioning teachers as competent when in fact, according to regulations, they are not: for example, SGMT assistants as teachers. While it is positive that the SGMT assistants hold quite a strong position here – a fact not commonly reported (Rosén et al., 2019; School Inspectorate, 2017b; Reath Warren, 2017) – the appointment of them as teachers is problematic. Also, the appointment of teachers not qualified to teach Social Sciences with its predominantly Sweden-based content may be viewed as problematic.

The problems and challenges associated with LIP highlighted in research (Sharif, 2017, Bomström Aho, 2018; Hagström, 2018; Bjuhr, 2019; Wedin & Bomström Aho, 2019; Wedin, 2021; Hermansson et al. 2021) and reports (SNAE 2016b, 2019, School Inspectorate, 2017a) are confirmed in this study. The ambiguities that appear regarding how teachers are positioned as competent or not means that there is a significant risk for students to not receive the education they have the right to. The low status of the programme and its students may be a general reason for the problems as it may result in a lack in competence among staff, as well as instability due to a high turnover of staff. However, what stands out clearly here is the importance of knowledge at the management level. When principals are so explicitly positioned as responsible for the quality of education and teacher competence, then they too clearly require relevant competence. This not only refers to knowledge about L2-development among students or about language development approaches in the subjects, as mentioned in regulations, but it also refers to organisational issues in relation to LIP. Principals' competence should then include knowledge about the roles of and required competence among other teaching staff categories, such as SGMT assistants, SSL-teachers, other subject teachers and MTT teachers.

This study shows the importance of relevant competence among teachers and principals in introductory and transitional programmes for recently arrived adolescents. The conflicting discourses that appear here means that students run the risk of not being given equal opportunities to education. Even those students who manage to meet the requirements for mainstream programmes are likely to meet too high challenges if they were not taught necessary knowledge in various subjects or the language used to express this at LIP.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Interviews and observations were made in collaboration with another researcher, Erika Bomström Aho.

<sup>3</sup> Any translations of Swedish text, including quotes in Swedish, are those of the author.

<sup>4</sup> Ö is the last letter in the Swedish alphabet; as such, this is similar to “From A to Z” in English.

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