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To cite this article: Hildegunn Fandrem, Hanne Jahnsen, Svein Erik Nergaard & Kirsti Tveitereid (2021): Inclusion of immigrant students in schools: the role of introductory classes and other segregated efforts, International Journal of Inclusive Education, DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2021.1950222](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1950222)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1950222>



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Published online: 23 Jul 2021.



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## Inclusion of immigrant students in schools: the role of introductory classes and other segregated efforts

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper was to investigate structural aspects of inclusion of immigrant students in Norwegian multicultural schools and, more specifically, their experiences of introductory classes and other segregated efforts. Due to their need for Norwegian language education, newly arrived immigrant students are not necessarily physically integrated into mainstream classes during their first two years of schooling, and they are also often taken out of their classes after they have been assigned to mainstream classes. This study had a qualitative design, and semi structured interviews are used to gather the data. The sample consisted of six immigrant boys, six native Norwegian boys and six teachers in secondary schools. The immigrant students had lived in Norway for two to four years. The results showed that introductory classes seemed not to be sufficiently adjusted to the students' need for inclusion but operated more as a fixed structural measure for second language learning. As the introductory classes and other segregated efforts often diverged from ordinary subjects and class times, it is possible that introductory and segregated efforts contribute to maintaining segregation more than they result in inclusion experiences.

### ARTICLE HISTORY



Received 24 March 2021  
Accepted 28 June 2021

### KEYWORDS

Immigrant students; inclusion; inclusive education; structural aspects; introductory classes; introductory efforts

Internationally, the concept of inclusion was used in relation to multiculturalism as early as 1971. In an interview with John Berry, the Canadian prime minister emphasized, in his explanation of why multiculturalism had failed in some countries, that there are two conditions that need to be met for multiculturalism to succeed (CACR VUW 2014):

It is not only about diversity; diversity must be accompanied by social inclusion. Cultural diversity is a public good; it is good for a society, it's good for the people to have the development and maintenance of diversity in their population. But people must also have an opportunity to participate as culturally different people in the daily life of the society.

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For children and adolescents, school is the most important arena to experience such participation. Participating and thus learning together in the school community are essential for immigrant children and youth to experience inclusion.

The aim of this paper is to investigate inclusion processes in classes with immigrant students in Norwegian schools, with a specific focus on the immigrant students' experiences of introductory classes when they arrived and other segregated efforts after they were integrated into mainstream classes. Previous international literature on newly arrived students has primarily dealt with the question of whether to organise initial schooling in separate schools or classes (i.e. 'introductory classes') or to directly place children in ordinary classes through so-called direct immersion (Bunar 2018). Studies have been conducted in, e.g. the US (Feinberg 2010), Canada (Allen 2006), Germany (Vogel and Stock 2018), Italy (Grigt 2018), Spain (Cuesta 2018) and Sweden (Bunar 2018; Nilsson and Axelsson 2013). Generally, these studies have, however, focused primarily on language learning and less on social factors. In addition, the focus has mostly been on policy documents and the opinions of policymakers, teachers and other school personnel, while immigrant students' own perspectives on the pedagogical and social realities they face on their way to the mainstream system seem to a large extent to be absent. Allen (2006) and Nilsson and Axelsson (2013) are exceptions.

The studies conducted so far in Norway on introductory classes have been small and have focused more on teachers' perceptions and/or subjects (e.g. Størksen 2010; Sørensen 2016; Skjold 2019) than on students' perceptions of inclusion. Some studies on upper secondary schools have been performed (Hilt 2016; Solbue, Helleve, and Smith 2017), but studies on younger children are scarce. It is the age group in lower secondary school that is portrayed as having particular challenges in the transition to upper secondary school and further education (PISA 2013). Two studies conducted in Norway consulted newly arrived students in lower secondary school on how they experienced introductory classes or the transition to the mainstream system and the ramifications for their perceived inclusion. In these studies, however, the informants were either still in the introductory class or receiving extra language education (Rambøll 2016) or the introductory class was located in the same school as their mainstream class (Rikstad 2020). To our knowledge, no Norwegian study has previously investigated students' experiences of introductory classes when these classes are organised outside the mainstream school. In addition, according to the UN Convention of the Right of the Child, children have a right to be heard, this is explicitly operationalised in the Norwegian Act regarding the right to a safe and good learning environment (Education Act 2019). This act presupposes that the assessment of students' experience of this right must be based on the student's subjective experience. The right to a safe and good learning environment is less emphasized as an aspect of inclusion, and when it comes to introductory efforts. The present paper seeks to compensate for this using students as informants.

## The Norwegian education system for immigrants

Like other European countries, Norway has experienced increased ethnic diversity because of immigration in recent decades. All immigrant students in Norway, like all Norwegian students, have a right and an obligation to receive educational training in the local school. However, newly arrived immigrant students are usually not physically

integrated into mainstream classes at the beginning of their schooling in Norway. The few schools that practice direct integration, offer some additional support (Skrefsrud 2018). Most often newly arrived immigrants attend introductory classes for one or two years inside or outside their nearby school before they join mainstream classes with other children of the same age (Rambøll 2016). Introductory classes are intended to serve as one-time, intensive linguistic preparation for mainstream classes. The achievement of this goal is typically complicated by students' varying levels of education and language (ranging from mother-tongue illiterate to highly educated), diversity in terms of age (e.g. 5th and 7th graders may be placed in the same introductory class in small towns), and an often highly 'mobile' enrollment schedule (students may be enrolled at any time during the year, depending on the time of arrival to the country); in addition, students may exit introductory classes and enter the mainstream when they are considered ready by the teacher and the transition is approved by the school administration. Members of an introductory class study the second language and all other subjects together and in isolation from their mainstream peers; thus, they use and learn the host language in academic and social isolation from the school's mainstream. In summary, introductory classes function in relative isolation from the mainstream class and as such share some similarities with 'special needs' programmes described in the inclusive schooling literature (Allen 2006).

## Inclusion and inclusive education

In school policy, inclusion as a concept has previously most often been related only to special education even if the Salamanca statement (UNESCO 1994) stated as a guiding principle that the regular schools 'should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.' (6) The inclusion concept is built on values of equity, acceptance of diversity, democracy, belonging and participation (Bachmann and Haug 2006). High expectations of all learners follow. To implement inclusive education, Booth and Ainscow (2011) recommend starting by identifying barriers to learning and participation in the cultures, policies and practices of the school. Today, policy makers and researchers both in Norway and other countries have argued for a more inclusive approach to educational integration, including among newcomers to a country. Embracing pluralism in education was in Quebec education policy, for example, referred to in a 1998 document as an 'inclusive approach' to cultural diversity in schools (Allen 2006); however, this policy of 'intercultural education' was first implemented in recent decades in secondary schools in Canada. In Norway, the concept of inclusion has also more recently been related to immigrant students in both official documents (Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet 2004; Arnesen, Mietola, and Lahelma 2007) and in research (e.g. Solbue 2013; Jortveit 2015; Hilt 2016; Nergaard et al. 2020). It seems, however, that in Norway, as in other European countries (Bunar 2018), there is a lack of consistency between the intentions of inclusion policy and what teachers do in their everyday work to allow immigrant students to experience inclusion (Jortveit 2015; Nergaard et al. 2020).

In the literature, inclusive education is often referred to as *learning together as a community* in regular classrooms (e.g. Loreman 2007). In this definition, the *community* concept is crucial. Wenger (1998) states, moreover, that a *community of practice* is

established through the relations between humans in a group that share collaborative activities. Thus, participation and common engagement in tasks are important aspects of inclusion. Furthermore, Hilt (2016) found that the lower students are positioned in the school hierarchy, the more barriers they face to inclusion. This leads us to more structural, or organisational, aspects of inclusion. According to the ‘organisational paradigm’ of inclusion, as explained by Avramidis and colleagues (2002), ‘*the identification of students as having ‘special needs’ arises not ‘out of deficits within the students themselves (medical model) but out of deficiencies in the way in which schools are currently organised*’ (144). Thus, inclusion is about the requirements or conditions for participation set by a system (Hilt 2016). Even if it might be a challenge for immigrant students to participate on an equal basis because of factors related to acculturative stress (Berry 1997), such participation depends most of all on school systems’ ability to meet immigrants students’ needs in a way that allows them to experience inclusion.

### Introductory classes and other segregated efforts

Research from Sweden concluded that students experience opportunities for interaction with teachers and peers and a sense of belonging in introductory classes, more so than in regular classes (Nilsson and Axelsson 2013). Furthermore, Bunar (2015) claimed that there is a risk for reduced academic achievement if immigrant students are placed in mainstream classrooms without sufficient skills in the second language and support in the mother tongue but also emphasized that if students stay in the introductory class for too long, there is a risk that this will stop or pause their academic development.

Feinberg (2010) found that both the quality and the quantity of actual, real-life use of the target language in authentic social contexts is limited in an introductory school or class because of the skewed linguistic characteristics of the student body. He further emphasized that even though introductory schools or classes can be warm and sheltering spaces in which to care for and educate newcomers, such students may be shortchanged if placed in isolated schools, and both majority and minority students are denied the benefits of communicating with each other. Additionally, Allen (2006) found in his study among 13 – to 18-year-old youth in Quebec that the students experienced the introduction programme, ironically, as an obstacle to the mainstream regular courses. The host language itself became something of an enemy to the students, who desperately wanted to get on with their education and their lives.

The few studies conducted in Norway to evaluate introductory classes outside mainstream schools show somewhat inconsistent results. The most recent national evaluation, in which 220 municipalities participated, concluded that introductory classes are considered a highly positive option (Rambøll 2016) because they offer immigrant students the ability to learn the Norwegian language. The data for the evaluation were obtained from four wide-ranging surveys of a selection of 174 school owners (at both the municipal and county levels), school leaders, teachers, parents and students. The study, however, also emphasized that such classes must be treated as transitional. Moreover, the results from both immigrant students and parents in the study showed that they ‘... *in some cases want transition to mainstream education as quickly as possible despite the fact that their Norwegian skills might not be good enough*’ (5). In the study of Størksen (2010), in which five teachers were interviewed, teachers of both introductory and

mainstream classes reported that segregation from peers was perceived as negative by immigrant students. In addition, the teachers criticised that the transition is not professionally justified because of inadequate collaboration between introductory and mainstream schools.

Hilt (2016) found in her study of two upper secondary Norwegian schools that the teaching in introductory classes was characterised by students' lack of basic cultural references and often poor school-based prerequisites. This lack of basic cultural references, along with language problems, made it difficult to communicate at all and thus to learn. The teachers meant that the students were in need of resocialization and remedial education. This gave legitimacy to the students' segregation and a number of departures from usual educational principles. Based on this, we can also assume that the Norwegian language training was less effective than intended. Moreover, Solbue and colleagues (2017) studied what conditions or possibilities for inclusion in a mainstream class existed for students who had participated in an introductory class in upper secondary school. They found that immigrant students who entered an established class later than others did not participate in the community in the same way as the rest of the students. This emphasizes that physical integration does not necessarily mean inclusion.

The results regarding introductory classes may also apply to other Norwegian language learning efforts segregated from mainstream classes. Many immigrant students receive extra Norwegian language training outside of class. In general, previous research on partially segregated groups has emphasized that this type of segregation can only be justified to the extent that it is part of a strategy to make mainstream schools more inclusive (e.g. Jahnsen et al. 2009). In addition, Emanuelsson and colleague (2001) presented two different approaches to justifying and providing education for students who need extra help and support: the categorical and the relational. While the categorical approach is narrower and problem focused, the relational approach is more holistic and sees the students as a resource. This is in line with the social relational model of disability, that connects individual and social aspects in the understanding of students (Hedegaard-Soerensena, Jensena, and Tofteng 2017). Bachmann and Haug (2006) argue that, in aiming for inclusion, whether the teaching is based on a relational rather than a categorical perspective is more important than whether it is organised inside or outside the classroom. Also, Skrefsrud (2018) showed that how an integrated or segregated introductory programme was not the most important issue, but what was going on in the lessons as well. Slee (2011; 2019) takes the same critical position regarding justification of segregated practices as inclusive. To our knowledge, no studies on segregated language efforts for immigrants after their integration into mainstream classes have been conducted.

## The present study

There is a lack of studies in Norway investigating introductory classes and other segregated efforts for immigrant students in lower secondary school, especially from the perspective of the students. The aim of this study is to investigate whether these efforts are sufficiently adapted to each student's needs for inclusion. The main focus is on immigrant student's own perspective, but we supplement with opinions from their Norwegian peers and their teachers.

## Methods

### *Data collection*

The investigation of opinions about introductory classes and other segregated efforts in relation to inclusion in multicultural classes was part of a larger inclusion project. During spring 2017, individual semistructured interviews were conducted with six immigrant students and six native Norwegian students and their class teachers. Head teachers at selected schools were contacted by telephone and email. The head teachers, teachers and the students and their parents received written information, including the ethical guidelines. Written consent was obtained from all the participants. The interviews lasted for approximately 40 min on average. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

### *Participants*

The informants came from six different mainstream classes in three different mainstream secondary schools, and both the eastern and western regions of Norway were represented. Participating schools were selected because of their accessibility and proximity to the researchers. The main sample for the present study consisted of six immigrant boys who had previously attended introductory classes. In addition, data from interviews with six native Norwegian boys, which each were peers and from the same classes as the immigrant boys, and six class teachers of the six classes were used as supplementary information. All the students were in grade ten, and all the Norwegian boys were 15 years old; however, the immigrant boys' ages ranged from 15 to 17 years. We selected only boys to limit complexity and avoid gender-related issues. The immigrant students had been in introductory classes for between one and two years before they began attending the mainstream class in the mainstream schools in their neighborhood. The immigrant boys came from six different countries (Brazil, Costa Rica, Kenya, Lithuania, and Somalia) and thus spoke different mother tongues. All spoke Norwegian, but none of them spoke the language fluently. The immigrant boys had been in Norway for two to four years, and they lived with their families. They had different reasons for migrating.

### *Instruments*

Different interview guides were developed for the interviews with the students and those with the teachers. The student interview guide included some initial questions about the students' backgrounds and their class situations. The main themes were derived from inclusion theory and included belonging, membership in the class community (including questions about diversity), trust, safety, friendship, and well-being in the class. We also asked about cooperation in the class and teachers' practice. Additional questions for the immigrants concerned their migration situation ('Where are you from?', 'How long have you been in the country?', etc.), and we explored their experiences concerning the introductory efforts in depth ('What do you think about attending an introductory class?' and 'Do you think that the teachers understand what it is like for you to be new in the class?').

The interview guide for the teachers included initial background questions, followed by questions regarding the class community, diversity, teacher engagement and involvement, student learning and engagement, and teaching planning.



## Data analysis

We started the analyses for the overall project by reading through all the interviews to obtain a sense of them as a whole. We used thematic data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) with a theoretical rather than inductive approach, which means that we sought to fit the data to pre-existing coding frames—in our case, concepts related to the theory of inclusion. First, we analyzed each group, the immigrant boys, the native boys and the teachers, separately. We also used a semantic rather than a latent approach in this phase of our analysis. Thus, we identified the themes in the explicit or surface meanings of the data; what a participant explicitly said was more important than going beyond the semantic content of the data to identify or examine underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations. In the next step, we analyzed the three types of informants (the immigrant boys, the native boys and the teachers) together using a latent approach. At this stage, the researchers restated the themes that dominated in the three types of informants' respective units, and the themes of all the interviews were tied together in a descriptive statement. Meaning condensation (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) was further used to capture the complexity of the interview data. For the specific purpose of this study, the last step was to classify the transcribed data related to aspects of introductory classes and other segregated efforts. We used NVivo 11, which is a qualitative data analysis software, to store and sort the data.

## Methodological considerations

First, there is a risk of social desirability bias in our study, as all our data were collected through interviews. However, the main aim of this study was to capture immigrant students' own experiences. Moreover, some of the students' Norwegian language skills were quite weak, which may have caused misunderstandings during data collection. To address this challenge, we could have considered using interpreters to ensure the students' understanding of the questions and the quality of the dialogue; however, research conducted with an interpreter is a complex undertaking and may result in a false sense of the material's validity.

The most important methodological limitation of this study was that there were few informants. The sample was a convenience sample, and the views of 6 immigrant boys with additional information from 6 Norwegian students and their teachers may not be representative of those of other boys and teachers. However, as in quantitative research in general, the aim is not to generalise the findings, and the results have identified important areas that can be used to improve and develop inclusive education for immigrant students.

## Results

Four main themes emerged from our analyses. These were 1) *Introductory classes as safe havens and a good base for language learning*, 2) *Introductory classes as chaotic places not conducive to language learning*, 3) *Mainstream classes as the most important places for language learning and inclusion* and 4) *Mainstream classes as stressful places and the need for segregated effort*. For the two first themes only immigrant students' perspectives



were included and as can be seen, introductory classes give rise to opposing experiences. On the one hand, the immigrant students perceived intensive Norwegian language education as an advantage. On the other hand, they felt a lack of appropriate adaptation; they missed Norwegian peers and the opportunity to practice Norwegian with them. In addition, the loss of friends when they left the introductory class to join a mainstream class seemed crucial to their experience. Regarding segregation efforts after students' integration into mainstream classes, we find, in part, the same pattern as for the introductory classes; immigrant students experience these efforts as mostly in conflict with their social wishes and needs. The Norwegian students seem to understand this. Teachers, in contrast, see these introductory efforts as necessary to achieve learning. In the following, the results are presented and elaborated with extracts separately for each of the themes identified.

### ***Introductory classes as safe havens and a good base for language learning***

Immigrant students had positive experiences in the introductory classes in that they made friends who were also foreigners in Norwegian society; this is shown in the following statement: *'It was nice, a place where I got my first friends.'* Regarding intensive language learning, one of the immigrant students said, *'Maybe I would not have learned as much as I do now.'* Another one said that: *'I think it was good because you could learn more Norwegian there'*. Moreover, one immigrant students also thought that if they had not attended an introductory class, it *'would be difficult (...) to learn Norwegian and a subject at a same time'*. A general impression from one was that: *'I think it was important, I liked it'*.

### ***Introductory classes as chaotic places not conducive to language learning***

Regarding the negative experience of losing friends when they joined a mainstream class and the lack of appropriate adaptation, the immigrant students said, *'When we quit, I lost all my friends, they went to other schools ...'* and *'... it was chaotic'* and *'there were many different languages.'* One also said: *'in the introductory class, there where (...) so many foreigners and there were only two teacher that were Norwegian (...) I didn't learn much'*. Although introductory classes are usually smaller than mainstream classes, the age range and pedagogical needs are usually greater, this and the negative consequences of this were pointed out by one of our informants, as he said: *'... The introductory class was not my type, because those I went together with was very very young. So, we learned talking like a, b, c; the alphabet and such.'* This boy also talked about going in an introductory class as a negative thing because *'they [those going in introductory classes] do not meet Norwegian people'*.

### ***Mainstream classes as the most important places for language learning and inclusion***

Some immigrant students furthermore characterised the transition to a mainstream class in this way: *'When I started here, I learned much and It was better than the introductory class because ... there are Norwegian friends ...'* There were many Norwegians so we could

talk.’ A Norwegian peer said that: *‘It goes well (...), he has been very clever in talking and including himself (...) that we talk with him (...) helps him also with the language. So, it goes very well regarding connection ...’*

Regarding segregated efforts after students were integrated into the mainstream class, the discomfort of the immigrant students when taken out of class was so obvious that their Norwegian peers noticed it; as one of them said, *‘It [being taken out] is not always fun for them.’* Moreover, it appears that several immigrant students did not want to leave the class for special language education. One of them actually said, *‘I work alone in the class ... others work in groups. That’s very ok.’* It seemed that as long as he was included in the class, it did not matter that he was doing individual tasks. Another one that also appreciated being in the mainstream class said: *‘Yes, somehow, all of them [the students in the class] help me (...) and somehow, I don’t know how to explain it ...’* this student had difficulties with finding the right words for what exactly it was that made him feel included, he just seemed very satisfied with the situation of being in the mainstream class.

### **Mainstream classes as stressful places and the need for segregated effort**

One immigrant student pointed to the fact that starting in the mainstream class later than the other mainstream class members because he had attended the introductory class first was difficult: *‘I was ‘beside’ ... very few talked with me.’*

Regarding segregated efforts after students’ integration into the mainstream classes, some teachers thought that the immigrant students would benefit academically from being taken out of class. In at least four of the six classes, students are segregated for Norwegian language learning. One teacher expressed that this special need had to do with ethnicity and that the immigrant student in this class said that he was afraid of speaking Norwegian in class because he was afraid to say something wrong. Only one student, however, explicitly defended that he was taken out of the class because of poor Norwegian, and he used the concept of *exemption* in his description. This may be seen as a coping strategy and thus implies that he does not want to see himself as vulnerable.

Another teacher did not explain the segregation by ethnicity but just generally expressed the importance of how the teaching was organised by saying that *‘Some are placed/taken out in smaller groups’*, despite the perceived will of the students: *‘Maybe they do not always want to be taken out of class’.*

One teacher justified the segregation effort this way: *‘Sometimes it is those who are a little bit weaker ... that are taken out of class ... Sometimes it is those in the middle ... try to take them out of class together with another one that they trust, because that may make them talk ...’*

## **Discussion**

In one way, we may conclude from our findings, as also reported in the Norwegian national study by Rambøll (2016), that introductory classes are good because they are effective for language learning. In addition, in line with the findings of Nilsson and Axelsson (2013) in Sweden, our results show that introductory classes offer an environment in which newly arrived students can form positive relationships with peers in the same

situation. However, our results also support previous findings from, e.g. Størksen (2010), who doubts the claimed effectiveness and positive effects of introductory classes. More specifically, it seems that practicing the Norwegian language with Norwegian students is an important aim. Additionally, Nilsson and Axelsson (2013) found in their study that attending a mainstream class provides the opportunity to ‘hear more Swedish’. Moreover, they emphasize that there is a hope and belief that being in a mainly native-speaking context will enhance language learning; one is naturally exposed to the language or forced to speak it. Providing the opportunity to speak to native students and learn with them is about participation and common engagement and thus learning together as a community (Loreman 2007), which is an important aspect of feeling included in society.

Previous research has found that when introductory classes are organised in the same school, it can ease the transition to and inclusion in mainstream classes (Nilsson and Axelsson 2013; Rikstad 2020). However, when the introductory class is not located in the same school as the mainstream class, as was the case in our study, the transition may be more problematic. In this case, Nilsson and Axelsson (2013) point out that the students felt happiest in the introductory class, while the contrary was true of the mainstream class, which made students feel lonely, sad, excluded, or insecure. In addition, there was a lack of interaction between the newly arrived students, who had previously attended introductory classes but were now attending the mainstream class, and the rest of the members of the mainstream class; however, this did correspond only partly with our findings. In our study, the mainstream class for some of the immigrant students, unlike the Swedish study, did not seem to be experienced as the site of a twofold struggle – both to learn the language and to make contact with the other students.

From an inclusion perspective, one could furthermore argue that the idea of teaching immigrant students the Norwegian language first in a separate setting and then seeking to integrate them into the mainstream class does not make sense. Hilt (2016), Loreman (2007) and Wenger (1998) all refer to inclusion as something established through activities in a community. Thus, participation and common engagement in tasks are important aspects of inclusion. These aspects, one may claim, are not facilitated in the same way through a segregated effort. Some may argue, however, that if the aim of introductory classes is reached, i.e. the students reach a specific level of Norwegian language skills, they will have the opportunity to participate on a more equal basis in mainstream classes after having attended introductory classes. Thus, *the conditions* for inclusion when one joins a mainstream class might be better if one has first attended an introductory class than if one has not. However, our data did not necessarily support this assumption. An important aspect that needs to be taken into account is that the acculturation period (Berry 1997) is a vulnerable one for newcomers. With earlier losses and changes, having to leave an introductory class may be experienced as another loss; as one student reported, ‘*I lost friends ...*’. In this situation, a positive adaptation process for immigrants may become more difficult or be delayed. Moreover, as Solbue, Helleve, and Smith (2017) claims, immigrant students who start in a mainstream class later than others do not take part in the community the same way as the rest of the students, who were new to each other when they started in the class all at the same time. This was supported in our findings. Additionally, Nilsson and Axelsson (2013) found that when students joined the introductory classes half way through the academic year,

they were disadvantaged in several ways, first by having been dropped into the middle of a course rather than starting at its beginning, second by having to learn two terms worth of course material in one term, and third by having to meet the first and second challenges in a new language. This indicates that physical integration into mainstream classes should, if possible, be done when the class is established as a unit.

For one of our students, being an ‘island in the mainstream’, as Bunar (2015) expresses it, was acceptable, or at least, he did not experience exclusion as long as he was physically integrated into the mainstream class. Even if his language skills were poor, this did not seem to be a problem for this student, and as long as he worked on individual tasks adapted to his level, there might not be a risk for reduced academic achievement.

The fact that teachers ignore immigrant students’ social needs indicates that they have a categorical approach to immigrant students rather than a holistic relational approach (Emanuelsson, Persson, and Rosenquist 2001; Hedegaard-Soerensena, Jensen, and Tofteng 2017; Nergaard et al. 2020) regarding segregated efforts. Only one of the teachers may be said to possess a relational perspective. Another teacher believed that the beneficial ends justified the students being taken out of class against their will. In this categorical way, problems are connected directly to the students and looked upon as being due to their limitations. From this perspective, less emphasis is placed on individual assumptions and the students’ own understanding of their situation. In contrast, from a relational perspective, teachers look for the students’ resources and see them as individuals. Students’ problems are considered more as a consequence of the interaction between them and their environment rather than as inherent in them. In our study, the students’ own desires and experiences often seemed to be set aside and not emphasized. This may also be said to reflect an attitude among the teachers that students are, as Hilt (2016) expresses it, in need of resocialization and remedial education, disregarding their individual needs. Segregated efforts may be considered in line with inclusion if the student understands and interprets them this way. Thus, it is not necessarily where the student is physically placed that is important. Partial segregation, as is often practiced in special education, may be justified as inclusive if mainstream teachers are characterised by a relational attitude and students understand and interpret the segregated approach in this way. This point indicates that for some students, it may not be the way classes are organised that is the most important determinant of whether a practice is inclusive (Emanuelsson, Persson, and Rosenquist 2001; Bachmann and Haug 2006; Jahnsen et al. 2009; Slee 2011; 2019).

Last, an important aspect of our study was that the contradictions in the arguments for using or not using introductory classes were illustrated by the fact that it was to some extent the same students who talked about both the positive and negative aspects. This paradox may be due to difficulties for the students in arguing against what is being offered as intensive language training because of poor language skills; thus, they do not see any option other than attending introductory classes.

## Conclusion

The point of departure for this study was that immigrant students in Norway can experience inclusion in society through participation in a community of practice in school, i.e. by using the Norwegian language during learning processes with peers at school. Our

findings seem, to some degree, to contradict the general conclusion drawn from the study of Nilsson and Axelsson (2013) that students experience opportunities for interaction with teachers and peers and a sense of belonging more in introductory classes than in mainstream classes. From our data, it seems that compared to introductory classes, mainstream classes provide more of the social resources and inclusion processes that students long for.

Direct integration into mainstream classes or the opposite—starting in introductory classes—can both influence students' ability to learn (Bunar 2015). In Norwegian politics, there is a strong focus on the lack of language skills among immigrants, which might be why the system with introductory classes is so often used (Rambøll 2016). The authorities' recommendation to use introductory classes seems, however, to take only the students' need to learn Norwegian into account, ignoring their need for belonging. As previous research in Norway has shown (Størksen 2010) and as our data also showed, the introductory classes seemed not to be sufficiently adjusted to the students' needs for inclusion but operated more as a fixed structural measure for second language learning. As the teaching in the introductory classes and other segregated settings also often diverges from ordinary subjects and class time, it is possible that introductory and segregated efforts contribute to maintaining segregation more than they result in inclusion. Hence, although introductory classes can be a favorable social and pedagogical environment for newly arrived students, it is important to emphasize that their role is transitional and should be premised on temporary grounds. The intention should for newly arrived students be transition into the mainstream system for both social and pedagogical reasons.

Allen (2006) argues that rather than attending to the acquisition of language, as a discrete system or even as a form of capital (as theorized by Bourdieu 1991), host-language learning researchers and educators should focus on language not as something we obtain to gain membership in a given community but as something we learn and use partly as a result of being included in a particular community. It is through an emphasis on participation that newly arrived immigrants are likely to develop new relationships and engage in new activities that facilitate both their learning of the host language and their inclusion in the host community. Moreover, it is through dynamic interaction the process that leads to inclusion can happen, in which both social and traditional learning activities takes place. As stated by Wenger (1998) and Loreman (2007) the active participation and the continuous development of learning communities become the most important prerequisites for real inclusion.

When host-language learning rather than participation becomes the primary focus of newcomer integration, immigrants can end up feeling alienated and excluded not only from the host community but also from the host language itself (Nilsson and Axelsson 2013). Both social and pedagogical provisions need to be made in the mainstream system for schools to fulfil their inclusive and educational aims.

## Implications and future research

On the basis of the present research, we may claim that municipalities' establishment of structures aiming for the inclusion of newly arrived immigrants should be guided by immigrant students' individual needs more than by organisational models. Whichever

system is used, there is a need to have high expectations coupled with a high level of support if immigrant students are to succeed. Supporting individual students will also include taking into account their social needs and that they have language capital and are often very ambitious. It is crucial to harness immigrant students' ambition as quickly as possible and help them experience that a new successful life is possible and accessible through education. This calls for relationally oriented teachers. What such teachers' practice should look like should be explored in future studies. More studies on what is going on in the lessons in both mainstream classes and introductory classes, in addition to studies on how school management deals with the challenges, should be conducted in the future.

The present study focused on experiences regarding previous participation in introductory classes organised outside the mainstream school. Even if the results correspond with previous studies on introductory classes inside mainstream schools (Rambøll 2016; Skrefsrud 2018) claiming that introductory classes are good because they are effective for language learning, our study emphasize the need for research that compares different introductory efforts related to inclusion. Thus, future studies should distinguish between municipalities and schools of different sizes and among the different types of segregation efforts for Norwegian language learning in existence. This research should also include the question about establishing introductory classes, which Nilsson Folke and Bunar (2016) claim are part of a structure that supports a deficit model, compared to direct integration into mainstream classes, which represents a relational perspective because it recognises individuals' needs and resources. This would add to the understanding of if, and in what way, different introductory efforts are effective at achieving inclusion in the long run. This will further have important implications for the research-based discussion regarding introductory classes as segregation efforts for inclusion, which seems to be absent in the official policy debate, at least in Norway. An important reminder might be that, as Bunar (2018) emphasizes, newly arrived students are not just language learners; they are first and foremost learners, just like all other children in school.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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