Becoming Teachers Again

Migrant Teachers' Experiences of Integration
and Belonging in Dutch Education

Anne Floor Groen

Colophon

The photo on the cover page is from the programme Wereldburgers voor de Klas and is used with permission from the organisation.

I cannot be a teacher without exposing who I am.

Paulo Freire

Preface

Belonging is a profound human need. To feel at home and to find a place where one can take root. It is about bringing all the parts that make us who we are, and still being welcomed. Yet for many, this sense of belonging is constantly questioned. Through the narratives of migrant teachers, I have seen how belonging can be shaped – and at times taken away – by subtle words, everyday decisions, and invisible boundaries. Belonging and integration are often described as personal tasks, something newcomers must accomplish. However, true integration is a shared responsibility. It requires openness not only from those who arrive, but also from the society that receives them. If we ask people to adapt, we must also be willing to reflect on the systems, expectations, and habits that make feeling at home so difficult. This realisation became the starting point of this research: a search for understanding how belonging is built, and how we might build it together. Because when we recognise the problem, we can also become part of the solution.

First and foremost, I would like to thank all the migrant teachers who shared their stories and experiences with me. Your honesty, strength, and resilience have been both humbling and inspiring. My gratitude also goes to my internship organisation, Stichting Wereldburger, and the team of the programme Wereldburgers voor de Klas. In the pace of daily work it is easy to forget, but together you create something truly meaningful. Thank you, Gürkan, for the many opportunities, for your trust, and for giving me the space to grow. Thank you, Maud, for every thoughtful conversation, for your clear and caring advice, and for the genuine interest you showed throughout this process. To my friends and family, thank you for your endless support, for listening when I struggled and for reminding me to keep going. And to my master's thesis supervisor, Lothar, thank you for your valuable feedback and guidance.

Before you begin reading this thesis, I would like to share two final messages. First, to everyone working in and around schools in the Netherlands: ask migrant teachers a question. Invite them into your classrooms, your conversations, and your teams. Take a moment for a coffee, to listen, to connect, and to learn from one another. Small gestures can make a world of difference. Belonging grows when we choose empathy over judgement and openness over fear. And finally, to the migrant teachers: keep believing in yourselves. Keep showing who you are, and keep standing for one another. The path is not always easy, but you bring something truly beautiful and essential with you. You will become teachers again, and the Netherlands should be proud to have you!

Anne Floor Groen

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Abstract

This thesis explores how migrant teachers navigate their integration and sense of belonging within Dutch education, and how schools and training programmes shape that journey. Drawing on mixed-methods research – including interviews, surveys, and observations of participants in the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme – the study reveals that returning to the classroom is not a simple reinstatement of a career, but a profound act of rebuilding meaning and identity. Their stories tell of frustration and perseverance, of finding one's voice again in a new language and culture. While policy often frames integration as a 'two-way process,' in practice it remains largely one-sided: institutions define the terms of inclusion, while teachers shoulder the weight of adaptation. Yet belonging, as the findings show, is not produced by policy or procedure, but through everyday acts of recognition, trust, and dialogue. The thesis argues that genuine integration requires reciprocity – shared responsibility, mentorship, and cultural openness – through which migrant teachers are not merely accommodated but recognised as full professionals. When these conditions are met, belonging ceases to be an endpoint and becomes a living, relational practice that enriches education for everyone involved.

Keywords: Migrant teachers, integration, belonging, inclusion, Dutch education, recognition, teacher shortage, professional identity, Wereldburgers voor de Klas

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1. Introduction

1.1 Becoming teachers again

At the end of a long day in Groningen, fifteen migrant teachers sit together in a classroom. They are former educators from countries such as Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Ukraine, who once taught in their own school systems but are now trying to rebuild their professional lives in the Netherlands. Most of them were forced to flee their home country due to conflict, persecution, or political instability.

As part of a training programme called in Dutch 'Wereldburgers voor de Klas' (literally 'World Citizens for the Classroom'), which prepares them to work in Dutch education, they spend their days studying the Dutch language, learning about the curriculum, and navigating a new educational culture (Wereldburgers voor de Klas, 2025a). Tired after their morning language class, they decide to use their peer supervision session to talk about something that weighs on all of them: the dynamics of the staff room. One participant shares that, at her school, everyone has a fixed seat and that new colleagues and interns sit apart from the more experienced teachers. 'No one ever asks who I am,' she says. 'I feel lonely and do not dare to speak. I am afraid they will judge me for who I am, and that my Dutch is not good enough.' Another teacher nods in recognition. During her first months, she mostly observed. 'After a while, I knew who I could talk to about what,' she says, 'but I notice that I always have to be cheerful to make contact. It takes a lot of energy when it only comes from your side.' Someone else adds that one-on-one contact with direct colleagues usually goes well, but she feels invisible in the group. 'People are kind,' she says, 'but often too busy to really notice me.' In meetings, she listens more than she speaks, unsure when it is her turn to join in. 'It is not that anyone excludes me, but sometimes I feel like I am there without really being seen.' She pauses for a moment, then asks, almost to herself: 'How can I feel part of a team that does not seem to see me?'

Another participant nods. 'I didn't go to the study day last week,' he admits. 'I came here for safety and with the idea that I could be a teacher again one day. But now, at school, I do not always feel safe at all.' One participant shares a different experience. She has been working as a teaching assistant at a high school for nearly two years now, the longest of anyone in the group. 'The first two years, I felt lonely too,' she says, 'but slowly that changed.' Around Christmas, she started baking cookies for her colleagues and made sure to join every activity she could: study days, celebrations, team outings, and school projects. 'For me, that helped,' she says. 'It took a lot of time and energy, but that is how I found deeper connection with my colleagues.' The group then reflects on whether language plays a role in these experiences. 'Our Dutch is not perfect, and that makes it hard to follow conversations,' one participant says. 'But that should not be a reason not to connect, right?' They all agree that they should not be afraid to ask if people could speak slower, explain things, or avoid talking in dialect.

Another points out that it is not just about language. 'It is also culture,' he argues. 'Everything is different here, the habits, the ways people interact. We have to learn all of that from scratch.' As the discussion continues, some of them admit they sometimes feel uneasy when politics or the news come up in conversations. With elections approaching and migration often in the headlines, they find themselves wondering what colleagues, students, or parents really think about people like them. 'It is not that anyone says something unkind,' one teacher explains, 'but sometimes I wonder what people really think of me.' By the end of the session, as they share their experiences, a sense of quiet determination fills the room. Still, there is resilience in their voices. One participant says he refuses to give up. 'We've come this far already,' he continues. 'That means something. We have worked hard, we have something to add to the society we now live in. We should not forget that.' He admits that sometimes it is difficult, 'because it feels like we are always the ones trying to fit in. But we have to keep going. We should believe in ourselves. If we keep showing up, if we keep trying, then one day they will see that we are teachers too, just like them.'

In the narratives of these migrant teachers, frustration and resilience are closely intertwined. Beneath their words runs a quiet but persistent desire to belong – to share their knowledge and experience, and to feel meaningful again in a place where they are still taking root. They want nothing more than to contribute to the Dutch education system, yet they keep running into barriers that rarely appear in the data or policy reports: barriers of language, recognition, and unspoken expectations. Their stories make clear that integration in education is not just an administrative matter of diploma validation or language proficiency. It is a profoundly social and emotional journey – one that depends on mutual adaptation, acceptance, trust, and a genuine sense of belonging.

These experiences are not isolated. They mirror broader structural challenges within Dutch education: an ageing workforce, teacher shortages, and limited resources. Moreover, while classrooms are becoming more diverse, the teaching staff remains largely homogeneous. Experienced migrant teachers, who could bridge both these gaps, often remain unseen and underutilised. In this thesis, the term 'migrant teachers' refers to highly educated newcomers, including refugees, Ukrainian displaced persons, and knowledge migrants. They were trained and worked as educators in their countries of origin and are now seeking to re-enter the teaching profession in the Netherlands. Through interviews, surveys, and observations, I had the opportunity to get to know these individuals and to learn from their journeys of rebuilding their professional lives through programmes such as Wereldburgers voor de Klas, which support their linguistic, pedagogical, and professional integration into Dutch schools.

1.2 Relevance

1.2.1 Societal relevance

<u>Who stands in front of a diverse classroom?</u>

At the beginning of 2021, the Netherlands counted nearly 1.4 million young people with a migration background. That is about 28 percent of all residents aged 0 to 25. In the three largest cities – Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, the proportion is considerably higher. In The Hague, for instance, around 60 percent of young people had a migration background in 2021. Nearly 70 percent of these young people, were born in the Netherlands, making them part of the second generation (Van Roon, 2021). Dutch classrooms are thus more diverse than ever. Yet, the same cannot be said about the teachers who stand in front of the class.

According from Statistics Netherlands, only one in ten teachers in primary education has a migration background (Traag, 2018). This gap is even wider in secondary education. In addition, teachers with a non-Western migration background remain significantly underrepresented. Data from Voion and the Amsterdam Teachers' Monitor show that in the 2018–2019 school year, only 6 percent of secondary school teachers had a non-Western migration background, even though this group made up 11 percent of the total working population (Ahamiane, Van der Wouden & Spijker, 2020; El Ghoulbzouri et al., 2024). These figures show a clear picture. While the student population in the Netherlands is becoming increasingly diverse, the teaching workforce remains strikingly homogeneous.

This imbalance has far-reaching consequences. Research by Friperson, Oosterbeek, and Van der Klaauw (2023) reveals a persistent form of teacher segregation. Educators with migrant backgrounds are concentrated in a limited number of schools, creating what the authors call a 'hidden divide' within Dutch education. As a result, many children rarely encounter teachers who reflect their own identities or experiences. International studies echo this concern. Yip and Saito (2023) emphasize that a representative teaching workforce is essential not only for equity but for the quality of education itself. Their presence in schools can help bridge cultural divides, act as role models for diverse student populations, and foster intercultural competence across the classroom community. Yet, as Abacioglu, Volman, and Fischer (2020) point out, inclusion cannot be achieved by recruitment alone. Teachers' openness to diversity, empathy, and self-reflective awareness are equally vital for creating truly responsive classrooms.

However, this imbalance also presents an opportunity. With their multilingual skills, intercultural understanding, and international experience, migrant teachers are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between a diverse student population and a still largely homogeneous teaching workforce. Recognising and supporting this potential not only helps address structural shortages, but also contributes to a more inclusive, representative, and resilient education system.

Structural pressures in Dutch education

Additionally, this issue of diversity unfolds against a broader backdrop of structural pressures within the Dutch education system, where demographic changes, teacher shortages, and policy constraints further challenge the sustainability of the teaching profession. One of the pressing developments is the ageing of the teaching workface. Figures from the Ministry of Education (OCW in Cijfers, 2024a) show that roughly one in three primary and secondary teachers is now over fifty. This means that a substantial proportion of experienced teachers is expected to leave the profession in the coming years. The Education Council warns that this development will further exacerbate existing shortages and undermine continuity within schools (Onderwijsraad, 2023). What initially emerged as a concern in primary education is now extending to secondary and vocational education, where an increasing number of teachers are approaching retirement (UWV, 2024).

At the same time, the Netherlands faces a structural shortage of teachers across nearly all educational sectors. In primary education alone, the shortfall amounts to around 7,700 full-time positions (fte), representing over eight percent of the workforce (PO-Raad, 2024). The problem is most acute in the G5 cities – Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, and Almere – where schools struggle to fill vacancies. Secondary education shows a similar pattern, with deficits especially high in language and STEM subjects (VO-Raad, n.d.). Vocational education is likewise under pressure, facing a shortage estimated between 900 and 1,400 fte (OCW in Cijfers, 2024b).

The pressure is intensified by another structural issue: teacher attrition. Each year, many beginning teachers leave the profession before they have fully settled into it. Around nine percent of novice teachers in primary education and nearly one in five in secondary education quit within their first year (OCW, 2023). Workload, administrative burdens, and emotional exhaustion are key reasons (Van den Heuvel & De Vroome, 2024; UWV, 2024). Teachers are among the professions most affected by burnout symptoms, with more than a third of secondary school teachers reporting related complaints (Van Den Heuvel & De Vroome, 2024). Beyond workload, many new teachers lack adequate mentoring and professional support. Research by Dekker, Gaikhorst, and Schreurs (2021) shows that induction practices often fall short, leaving beginning teachers ill-prepared for the complexity of classroom realities. As schools struggle with staff shortages, the capacity to provide guidance diminishes further (Vijfvinkel, 2025).

This creates a vicious cycle: the fewer teachers there are, the heavier the workload becomes for those who remain, which in turn drives more teachers to leave. This dynamic places growing pressure on the quality, continuity, and long-term sustainability of the Dutch education system. Facilitating and supporting the entry of migrant teachers into Dutch education could therefore yield substantial benefits. It would not only reduce recruitment and training costs, but also strengthen the structural sustainability of the education system. Additionally, reintegrating migrant teachers into a field in which they already

possess professional experience enables them to contribute meaningfully, while promoting their long-term integration into Dutch society and the labour market. In this way, recognising and mobilising the expertise of migrant teachers transforms a current challenge into an opportunity.

The untapped potential and experiences of migrant teachers

While policy reports tend to present the issue through numbers and statistics on shortages and diversity, this research brings to light the human reality behind those figures. Focusing on the experiences of migrant teachers, this study demonstrates that the teacher shortage is not merely a quantitative problem of supply and demand, but also a qualitative and social one: who is recognised as a teacher, and under what conditions? By placing the experiences of migrant teachers at the centre, the study reveals how processes of recognition, exclusion, and belonging shape who is allowed to feel like a full and valued member of the teaching profession. The research emphasises that migrant teachers are not simply a group in need of support, but a source of talent, knowledge, and experience that can enrich Dutch education. Their international perspectives, multilingual skills, and intercultural competencies offer important added value in classrooms that are themselves becoming increasingly diverse.

At the same time, the study shows that this potential often remains underused due to barriers related to integration, credential recognition, and a lack of professional acknowledgement and guidance. Sustainable solutions to the teacher shortage therefore require more than recruitment alone; they demand structural investment in inclusive school cultures where migrant teachers can grow, be valued, and feel a genuine sense of belonging to their profession and workplace. Here, 'inclusive' refers not only to diversity in numbers but to everyday practices of recognition and participation that make belonging possible. This research shows that inclusion, recognition, and professional support are closely connected and can strengthen each other. It offers a new way of looking at the teacher shortage: not simply as a problem of too few people, but as a challenge to better recognize, support, and retain the existing talent. In doing so, this study connects two pressing societal issues, the teacher shortage and the lack of diversity within the teaching workforce, and shows how deeply they are intertwined.

Importantly, this study also offers practical insights for policymakers, schools, and training programmes. By giving a closer look into the everyday experiences of migrant teachers, it provides a grounded understanding of what integration and belonging mean in practice. Based on these insights, the study formulates recommendations aimed at creating more inclusive professional environments, support systems and policy instruments.

1.2.2 Scientific relevance

Although questions of inclusion and exclusion in education have been widely addressed in fields such as social capital and multicultural education, the specific experiences of migrant and refugee teachers received relatively little attention until the early 2000s. Since then, scholars have increasingly examined the systemic barriers these teachers face when trying to re-enter education systems in their host countries. A recurring issue is the non-recognition of foreign diplomas and teaching qualifications, which prevents many from returning to the classroom.

Pietka-Nykaza (2013) shows how bureaucratic rules and cultural differences limit refugee teachers' opportunities to teach in the United Kingdom. Although the term reflects the institutional framing used in these studies, it also implies a sense of temporariness that many teachers themselves resist.She argues that 'refugeeness' itself becomes a barrier, even when credentials are comparable. In Scotland, Smyth and Kum (2010) describe how exclusion from schools and difficulties gaining recognition from the General Teaching Council led many to lose both professional opportunities and confidence. A related study by Kum, Menter and Smyth (2010) emphasizes how refugee teachers' expertise often remains invisible unless supported by state initiatives such as the RITeS programme (Refugees Into Teaching in Scotland). Similar patterns appear in Canada, where Schmidt, Young and Mandzuk (2010) find that 'bridging programmes' for internationally educated teachers only succeed when linked to broader employment equity measures. However, these studies raise important questions: How do these institutional barriers actually feel to teachers navigating them? How are bureaucratic processes experienced in everyday professional life? Most research stops at policy-level description, leaving the lived dimension of exclusion underexplored. My study responds by adding this experiential perspective, showing how migrant teachers encounter, interpret, and sometimes resist these barriers in their daily practice.

Beyond these structural barriers, research has also examined how migrant teachers negotiate their professional identities within new cultural and pedagogical environments. Seah and Bishop (2001) were among the first to show that migrant mathematics teachers in Australia often experienced tensions between the teaching values they brought from their home countries and the expectations of the local education system. Whereas teachers from the Global South are often studied as 'migrants' adapting to new systems, comparable forms of mobility among Western teachers are typically framed as 'expatriate experiences' (Yee Koh, 2020). This asymmetry illustrates how professional mobility and belonging are socially stratified, reinforcing hierarchies of legitimacy within transnational education.

Subsequent studies have expanded this focus, exploring how such value conflicts shape migrant teachers' professional identities more broadly. Bense (2012) highlights subtle differences in pedagogy and classroom management among German teachers in Australia, while Jhagroo (2016) contrasts teachers' 'before' and 'after' professional lives in New Zealand, making experiences of cultural

dissonance particularly visible. Bressler and Rotter (2017) show that immigrant teachers in Germany often navigate a form of split identity: some embrace recognition for their intercultural skills, while others reject this label to assert professional equality with their peers. Yip (2023) identifies 'professional vulnerability' as a key emotion during these transitions, and Yip and Saito (2024) describe adaptation as uneven and non-linear, shaped by identity, belonging, and institutional recognition. While this body of work offers rich insight into the emotional and cultural dimensions of transition, it often treats these processes separately from the institutional structures in which they unfold. My study bridges this gap by examining how institutional contexts and everyday interactions together shape migrant teachers' sense of belonging.

Another theme that arises in literature, is the importance of institutional positioning. Santoro (2007) shows how migrant and Indigenous teachers in Australia are positioned as 'cultural brokers,' yet still regarded as outsiders. Ennerberg and Economou (2020), studying Sweden's 'fast-track' programmes, argue that retraining can build solidarity but also reproduce cultural tensions. Schmidt and Schneider (2016) take a broader view, showing across several countries how whiteness, monolingualism and national credential systems mark migrant teachers as 'others,' though in different ways. However, how are these structural positionings reproduced or challenged in the daily life of schools? How do teachers navigate such 'outsider' roles in real interactions with colleagues and students? My study adds a spatial and relational perspective, showing how belonging is produced – or disrupted – in classrooms, staffrooms and bureaucratic settings.

At the policy level, migrant teachers are often framed not by their expertise but by their assumed benefits for students. In the European Union, diversity in the teaching force is promoted as a way to provide role models and reduce equity gaps (Donlevy, 2015). This large EU study shows persistent under-representation of migrant and minority teachers and four recurring barriers: entry, completion, access, and retention. Yet the evidence behind the claimed benefits of diversity remains limited. Neugebauer, Klein and Jacob (2024) find little measurable effect of migrant teachers on migrant students' achievement in Germany, challenging the idea that diversity automatically reduces inequality. In practice, such framings risk valuing migrant teachers symbolically while neglecting their professional needs. My study builds on this critique by shifting the focus from diversity as a policy goal to diversity as a lived, relational process of inclusion and recognition within Dutch schools.

Evaluation studies reflect these same tensions. In Sweden, Ennerberg and Economou (2020) show that 'fast-track' schemes often leave teachers' roles and professional recognition unresolved. In the Netherlands, three evaluations of the Statushouders voor de Klas project – a programme for migrant teachers developed by Windesheim University of Applied Sciences – report similar findings. Alkemade and de Vries (2021) analyse recruitment and selection, Magee, Alkemade and de Vries (2022) describe the experiences of the first cohorts, and Magee and de Vries (2022) add reflections from placement

schools and students. Across these reports, language learning, cultural adaptation, mentorship and institutional goodwill emerge as recurring challenges. Beyond these programme evaluations, other scholars have examined belonging and agency from different perspectives. Elbaz-Luwisch (2004, 2007) shows how teachers in Israel 'make a place' for themselves through work and relationships. Dryden-Peterson (2022), in a large cross-country study, illustrates how refugee teachers sustain continuity and hope amid long-term displacement. Ozmantar, Cin and Mkwananzi (2023) describe Syrian refugee teachers in Turkey as both vulnerable and politically agentive. Yet within the Dutch context, such qualitative and relational insights remain scarce. My study addresses this gap by offering an in-depth exploration of how migrant teachers negotiate belonging in their everyday professional environments.

Overall, the literature highlights four main areas: barriers, identity, policy and agency. However, these remain fragmented. Structural and identity-based analyses are rarely integrated, and diversity policies are often examined separately from teachers' lived experiences in schools. This study addresses that fragmentation in three main ways. First, it brings together perspectives on integration and belonging, which are usually treated apart. Integration is understood as a state-led process focused on access, regulation and recognition, while belonging is a human and experiential process centred on emotion, participation and everyday interaction. By examining how these two processes intersect, the study shows that integration cannot be understood without lived experience, and belonging cannot be separated from institutional power. Second, it develops a critical, relational and spatial framework that connects these analytical levels. This framework examines how institutional logics, professional relationships and school spaces shape migrant teachers' sense of belonging. Third, it makes an empirical contribution by offering one of the first qualitative, in-depth accounts of migrant teachers' lived experiences in the Netherlands, extending previous evaluation studies with a more critical, relational and spatial perspective. By analysing how integration and belonging processes intersect within the spatial and social dynamics of the school, the study bridges structural and experiential perspectives and identifies where genuine reciprocity can emerge. In doing so, it positions schools as potential dialogical 'in-between spaces' where institutional norms and everyday practices of recognition meet.

1.3 Internship setting

From March to October 2025, I completed an internship at Stichting Wereldburger, a Dutch Foundation that promotes the development of global citizenship by supporting educational programs and cross-cultural engagement aimed at addressing social, ethical, and environmental challenges in an interconnected world (Stichting Wereldburger, 2025). One of its national programmes, Wereldburgers voor de Klas, facilitates the integration of highly educated newcomers – including refugees, Ukrainian displaced persons, and knowledge migrants who were trained educators in their countries of origin – into the Dutch education system (Wereldburgers voor de Klas, 2025a).

When I read a newspaper article written by the initiators of Wereldburgers voor de Klas, I immediately knew that this was the right place for my internship. The article emphasized the importance of fostering inclusive schools, diverse workplaces, and genuine encounters between people from different backgrounds, rather than placing the blame for so-called 'failed integration' on those with a migration background (Çelik, 2024). This resonated with my interest in exploring the experiences of migrant teachers, not only in terms of their integration, but especially in relation to their sense of belonging. Do they feel part of the community again once they start working, and what factors influence that feeling?

Wereldburgers voor de Klas was developed in response to the growing teacher shortage in the Netherlands and aims to support highly educated newcomers with a background in education in returning to teaching. In doing so, the programme not only addresses the quantitative shortage of teachers but also contributes to greater diversity and inclusion within the Dutch education system. The programme is currently active in 20 regions across the Netherlands, where it collaborates with local partners and schools to support the re-entry of qualified migrant educators into the teaching profession (Wereldburgers voor de Klas. 2025b). Beyond Wereldburgers voor de Klas, several other initiatives in the Netherlands also support the re-entry of migrant and refugee teachers into education. Examples include smaller projects developed by universities of applied sciences, such as the mathematics teacher track at Hogeschool Utrecht, initiatives at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam, and pilot projects at Windesheim. The UAF additionally provides individual guidance for refugee students and professionals, including those in teacher education. These initiatives show that Wereldburgers voor de Klas is not unique, yet it is the only programme currently operating across multiple regions rather than being tied to one institution or city. At the same time, participation in such programmes is no guarantee of a lasting teaching position.

During my internship, I was involved not only in research activities but also in the daily operations of the organisation. This dual involvement enabled me to develop an in-depth understanding of the programme's structure, its partnerships with schools, and the experiences of migrant teachers participating in the trajectory. This hands-on engagement provided valuable insight into the interplay between policy frameworks, professional support mechanisms, and the individual learning pathways of participants. Moreover, it allowed me to apply and further refine the knowledge and skills I had acquired during my bachelor's and master's studies, as well as through prior professional experience. Through close collaboration with participants, project leaders, coaches, language teachers, and school mentors, I gained a comprehensive understanding of both the opportunities and the challenges migrant teachers encounter when integrating into the Dutch education system.

Figure 1 illustrates the nationwide spread of the programme, which has been implemented at more than twenty locations across the Netherlands in several variants. The colours in the map indicate the education levels in which participants aim to work:
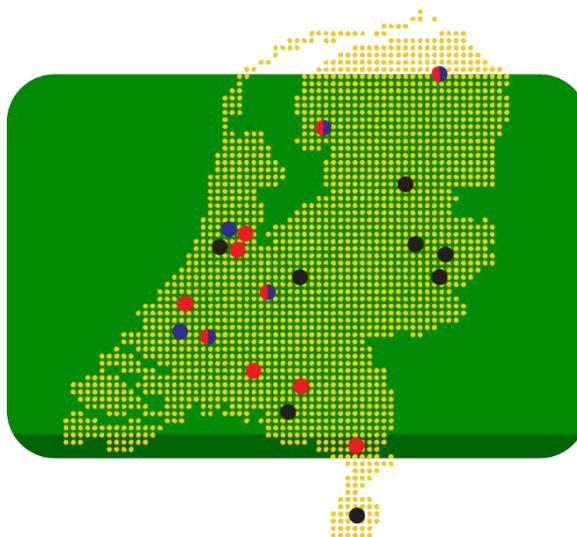
Figure 1: *Map showing locations of Wereldburgers voor de Klas*

Programme description

The programme of Wereldburgers voor de Klas consists of an intensive learning and work trajectory lasting at least one school year (starting from September until July). Participants follow:

- NT2 language course (approximately six hours per week, aimed at progressing from B1 to B2 level),
- Individual and group coaching and supervision,
- Workshops on the Dutch education system, and
- A work placement of two to three days per week at a school.

Together with a school mentor and coach, participants set personal learning objectives. Programme coordinators maintain regular contact with schools to monitor progress and ensure adequate support. At the end of the trajectory, possible next steps are explored, such as employment as a teaching assistant, enrolment in a formal teacher training programme, or participation in a qualification pathway leading to teacher certification (Wereldburgers voor de Klas, 2025a).

Participant profile

The participants in the programme come from a wide range of countries, including Afghanistan, Algeria, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Morocco, Ukraine, Somalia, Syria, and Turkey. Internal data from Stichting Wereldburger indicate that most applications are submitted by Turkish migrant teachers. This overrepresentation can partly be explained by political and social developments in Turkey since 2016, when thousands of educators and academics were dismissed or forced to flee following the government purges after the failed coup attempt (Kingsley, 2016; Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2018). Many of

these professionals have a background in education and sought opportunities abroad to continue their teaching careers. In addition, a social mechanism influences the composition of the participant group. Turkish teachers who are already enrolled in the programme often share their experiences through word-of-mouth within their personal networks, allowing new candidates to learn about the initiative through informal channels. This has created a self-reinforcing effect: the more Turkish migrant teachers join, the greater the likelihood that others with similar backgrounds will apply as well.

The application survey data indicate that approximately 25 percent of the participants have between 0 and 5 years of teaching experience, 42 percent between 5 and 15 years, and 33 percent more than 15 years. These figures suggest that participants are experienced professionals who bring extensive subject-matter expertise and pedagogical insight from their countries of origin. Many have taught in secondary or higher education and possess quaflifications that are often equivalent to or even exceed Dutch standards. As shown in Table 1, national data on teacher shortages in primary and secondary education are juxtaposed with application figures from Wereldburgers voor de Klas. This comparison provides insight into the extent to which the programme contributes to mitigating shortages in specific disciplines while reflecting the subject backgrounds of participating migrant teachers. The application data used in table 1 were collected between April 2023 and September 2025. As of November 2025, an additional 123 applications have been received, reflecting continued interest in the programme. These new applications, however, have not been included in the present analysis. This comparison reveals a striking overlap between the secondary education subjects with the greatest shortages (such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and English) and the subjects in which migrant teachers apply. Not all applications lead directly to placement or certification; some are duplicate entries, and others involve participants who do not yet meet the formal requirements. Nevertheless, the figures clearly demonstrate that this group represents significant potential to complement the Dutch teaching workforce.

Education level	Subject	Shortages (%)	Shortages (fte)	Applications
Primary	General classroom teacher	8,1	7.730	395
Secondary	Art	2,9	116	30
	Biology	3,4	126	128
	Chemistry	2,7	50	138
	Citizenship	5,8	95	33
	Classical languages	3,3	29	3
	Computer science	10	39	23
	Dutch language and literature	8,1	559	0
	Economics	4,6	141	27
	English	3,8	216	335
	French	3,8	90	15
	Geography	3,9	102	45
	German	5,8	142	8
	Health and social care	7,1	31	6
	History	1,6	49	89
	Mathematics	6,2	417	384
	Physical education	2	110	40
	Physics	4,4	111	192
	Physics-chemistry (combined subject)	10,3	106	50
	Religious education	5	39	42
	Technology	8	71	34
Total		**5,3**	**10.369**	**2.017**

Table 1: *National teacher shortages in primary and secondary education and applications to Wereldburgers voor de Klas* (OCW in Cijfers, 2024c; data received from Wereldburgers voor de Klas, 2025).

1.4 Research objective and questions

The main objective of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of how migrant teachers experience their integration and sense of belonging within the Dutch education system. It examines how they navigate new institutional structures, build relationships within schools, and adapt their professional identities and teaching practices to a different educational context. At the same time, the study investigates how schools and the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme create conditions that either enable or constrain processes of belonging, recognition, and professional development. This raises the following central research question of this thesis:

> *How do migrant teachers experience their integration and sense of belonging within Dutch education, and to what extend do schools and training programmes play a role in this process?*

To address this central question, the four sub-questions were developed:

1. *How do institutional structures shape migrant teachers' access to and position within the Dutch education system?*

The first sub-question focuses on the broader context in which migrant teachers seek to (re)enter the profession. It explores how Dutch policies, certification procedures, and institutional expectations influence their opportunities, roles, and positioning, as well as how these structures both enable and constrain their participation.

2. *How do relationships within schools influence migrant teachers' sense of belonging?*

The second sub-question centres on the social and spatial environment of the school. It explores how interactions with colleagues, students, and school leaders affect feelings of inclusion, recognition and support. It also examines how the physical and social organization of school spaces shapes migrant teachers' daily experiences of belonging and participation.

3. *How do migrant teachers negotiate and reconstruct their professional identities and teaching practices in relation to new cultural and pedagogical norms?*

This question examines the role of the training programme, which prepares migrant teachers for employment in Dutch schools. It analyses how the programme's structure, content, and support mechanisms influence participants' integration process and to what extent it fosters sustainable professional growth.

4. *In what ways does the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme support or limit migrant teachers' sense of belonging, participation, and professional development?*

By addressing these questions and considering structural, relational and individual dimensions, this study aims to capture both the challenges and the possibilities that shape migrant teachers' integration and sense of belonging. In doing so, it seeks not only to highlight the resilience and agency of migrant teachers, but also to offer insights into how schools and programmes can strengthen their support and cultivate more inclusive and reciprocal forms of integration in the future.

1.5 Reading guide

The introductory chapter has described the central theme and research inquiry of this thesis. After outlining the societal and scientific relevance, as well as the main research aim and questions, this section provides an overview of how the following chapters are structured. Each chapter builds upon the previous one, moving from theoretical discussion to methodological reflection, lived experiences of migrant teachers, and finally towards broader discussions, conclusions and recommendations for practice and policy. Together, they form a coherent story about belonging, recognition, and the ways migrant teachers rebuild their professional lives in a new context.

Chapter 2 lays the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the study. It discusses the key concepts of integration, belonging, the school as a social and spatial field, and in-between spaces. Classical and critical perspectives are brought together to show how integration can be understood as a reciprocal process, while belonging captures the emotional, spatial and political dimensions of inclusion. These ideas are then connected into one analytical framework that informs the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 3 explains how the research was conducted. It introduces the mixed-methods design, which combines survey data, semi-structured interviews, participant observations, informal talks, and visual portraits. The chapter also elaborates on the case study approach.. In addition, it reflects on ethical considerations, my own positionality as a researcher, and the balance between engagement and analytical distance. Particular attention is given to the collaborative nature of the study, which approaches migrant teachers not merely as research subjects but as knowledge holders, recognising their lived experiences as an essential source of insights.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings of the research. It explores the structural, social, and personal dimensions that shape migrant teachers' experiences in Dutch schools and the programme Wereldburgers voor de Klas. It discusses themes such as access to the profession, relationships within schools, identity reconstruction, and emotions.

Chapter 5 connects the findings to the theoretical framework in the discussion. It examines how belonging and participation are shaped at national, regional, and local levels, and how these levels interact. The chapter also critically reflects on integration as a policy and practice, arguing for more inclusive and reciprocal approaches that recognise migrant teachers' agency and contribution.

Chapter 6 summarises the main insights of the study and reflects on what these findings reveal about integration and belonging in Dutch education. It highlights both the structural barriers and the resilience that shape migrant teachers' professional trajectories, and discusses how schools can become spaces of dialogue, recognition, and shared learning.

Chapter 7, the final chapter, offers practical and policy recommendations for national institutions, schools, the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme, and the individual migrant teachers. It suggests how collaboration, recognition, and inclusive practices can empower migrant teachers and contribute to a stronger, more sustainable and more diverse education system. Additionally, the chapter identifies directions for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

Focusing on 'immigrant integration' prevents recognising the different political, social and economic issues that influence not only immigrants, but all the members of the same society… The concept of belonging, especially when highlighting social elements, brings a complementary perspective to the discussion on integration. (Enbuska, 2024, p.1483)

This chapter discusses three strands of literature that together form the foundation of my analysis. First, I address the literature on integration, ranging from classical approaches to more recent studies that conceptualize integration as a dynamic and 'two-way' process and the importance of inclusion. However, integration remains, in practice, largely a state-led and often reactive endeavour for those to whom it is applied, even when framed in participatory terms. In the context of schools and workplaces, this tension is reflected in how migrant navigate expectations of adaptation and belonging within institutional settings. Belonging, by contrast, foreground migrants' own practices of making place, seeking recognition, and negotiating conditional forms of inclusion. I examine the concept of belonging, both from psychological and social perspectives as well as from critical approaches that highlight the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Throughout this chapter I treat these as partially overlapping but potentially conflicting perspectives on the same realities. Where integration speaks the language of policy, belonging speaks the language of lived experience. Finally, I turn to literature that considers the school as a social field and a site of meaning-making, in which the notion of in-between spaces also plays a central role. Together, these three strands constitute the framework through which I analyse the experiences of migrant teachers in navigating the Dutch educational system, including challenges of recognition, adaptation, and belonging.

2.1 Integration

Classical approaches to integration

Scholars broadly agree that integration is difficult to pin down with a sharp definition, and it certainly has no fixed end point (Ager & Strang, 2008; Vertovec et al., 2001). Early approaches, such as those of sociologists Gordon (1964) and Park (in Weinar & Unterreiner, 2017), largely equated integration with acculturation: the process by which migrants adopt the dominant language and culture, sometimes while still retaining aspects of their original background. A well-known elaboration came from psychologist Berry (1992), who identified four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Through this model, he sought to explain how migrants adapt to a new cultural environment, depending on how individuals balance the maintenance of their heritage culture with

participation in the dominant society. While analytically useful, Berry's model has been criticized for being too static, overly focused on the individual, and for overlooking the fundamentally state-centric nature of integration discourses, which define and regulate who is considered 'integrated' (Alba & Nee, 1997; Brubaker, 2001). It pays little attention to power relations, to discrimination, or to the wider social and institutional context (Alba & Nee, 1997; Brubaker, 2001). In response, sociologists Alba and Nee (1997) developed a theory of 'neo-assimilation.' They argued that migrants gradually become part of mainstream society, as ethnic, cultural, and social differences fade over time. Unlike earlier one-sided models, they viewed integration as a diverse and flexible process in which institutions, alongside human and social capital, shape the different paths and outcomes of incorporation. By institutions, Alba and Nee primarily referred to the social and policy frameworks that mediate migrants' participation in society. However, later scholars have shown that these institutions are far from stable or uniformly inclusive.

Integration as a dynamic and 'two-way' process

More recent literature no longer sees integration as a linear trajectory of one-sided adaptation. Instead, it is described as a dynamic, two-way process in which both migrants and the host society undergo change (Ager & Strang, 2008; Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016; Lucassen, 2006; Vertovec et al., 2002). The report by Vertovec et al. (2002) remains one of the most widely cited and influential analyses of this perspective. It highlights how integration unfolds across multiple dimensions of society, from access to jobs and housing to participation in politics and culture. While this multidimensional perspective broadens the scope of integration beyond economics, it remains a largely state-driven concern, raising questions about whose interests integration ultimately serves and under what conditions it is promoted. They argue that integration can only succeed when newcomers are recognized as equal partners with full legal, political, and socio-cultural rights. The authors go on to raise a difficult but essential question: integration into what, exactly? In societies that are constantly changing and made up of many different ways of living, there is no single, fixed end point to aim for. From this view, integration does not mean 'melting into the majority,' but involves an ongoing negotiation of belonging within a diverse and sometimes tense social landscape. Vertovec et al. (2002) invite readers to think of integration not as a destination but as a continuous process of relationship-building, recognition of difference, and the creation of conditions for equal participation. This perspective challenges traditional, top-down ideas of integration by reframing equality and inclusion as dynamic, shared responsibilities rather than outcomes to be imposed.

> Since modern societies are highly complex, integration may take place differently in various
> subsectors. For instance, immigrants and refugees may find that they have access to the labour

market, but are excluded or disadvantaged in the welfare and education sectors (or vice versa). They may be included in both of these, but excluded from political membership. Or they may be included in all of these sectors, but excluded in terms of culture, identity and everyday forms of social interaction. (pp.114-115).

This shows that integration is not a single outcome but a set of uneven experiences, where people can be included in some areas of life but excluded in others. However, even this more open and flexible understanding of integration still has its limits. As critics such as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) point out, it often remains focused on the nation-state and therefore reflects what they call methodological nationalism. This perspective assumes that societies are naturally organised within national boundaries, and that social processes, including migration, take place primarily within them. As Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, p.311) observe, 'every move across national frontiers becomes an exception to the rule of sedentariness within the boundaries of the nation-state.' Migration is thus often seen as something unusual, a break from the 'normal' idea that people live and belong in one nation. Because of this, integration is sometimes understood as a way to bring migrants back into a stable, national order. Even the idea of 'two-way' integration can reproduce this way of thinking, by implying that there is one coherent national society into which newcomers must fit. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, pp. 325–326) therefore argue that 'going beyond methodological nationalism in the study of current migration may require more than a focus on transnational communities…we may have to develop analytical tools and concepts not coloured by the self-evidence of a world ordered into nation-states.' Their critique invites a broader view of migration that challenges the assumption of a bounded national community. Yet, in practice, most integration policies and public debates continue to operate within these national frames.

Critiques and paradoxes of 'two-way' integration

It is within this national logic that the idea of 'two-way integration' has gained prominence. Although widely seen as a progressive model, critical scholars argue that it rarely lives up to its promise in practice and that the language itself can be misleading (Ahmed, 2000; Favell, 2003; Schinkel, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 2011). The appeal of the metaphor lies in its apparent symmetry: it suggests that both migrants and the host society adapt to one another. Yet this suggestion of reciprocity obscures the power imbalance embedded in integration discourse, as state institutions and majority groups retain the authority to decide what counts as adaptation, participation, or belonging.

Schinkel (2018) argues that integration discourse does not simply describe how migrants settle but actively reproduces social hierarchies by imagining society as already complete, implicitly white, culturally stable, and morally coherent. The majority population enjoys what he calls a 'dispensation of

integration,' meaning they are exempt from scrutiny. Integration therefore functions less as a project of inclusion than as a boundary practice that distinguishes those who are assumed to belong from those who must continually prove their place. Schinkel and Van Houdt (2010) describe this dynamic as the 'culturalisation of citizenship:' integration becomes tied to cultural conformity and neoliberal self-responsibility. Migrants are expected to be both economically useful and culturally compliant, which reinforces the invisibility of majority norms while placing the burden of adjustment solely on newcomers.

Other scholars analyse the same asymmetry through the metaphors of hospitality and home. Ahmed (2000) shows how the 'host-guest' relationship underlying integration rhetoric is inherently hierarchical: the host defines the terms of welcome and retains the power to withdraw it. Hage (1998) similarly depicts the nation as a home managed by a dominant group that decides how much difference can be tolerated. What appears as generosity or mutual adaptation is therefore better understood as controlled admission. Yuval-Davis (2011) adds that we should distinguish between belonging, the emotional sense of feeling at home, and the politics of belonging, the institutional processes that determine who may legitimately claim that home. The language of 'two-way integration' tends to collapse these levels, presenting the national community as coherent and neutral while concealing the power relations that govern access to it. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) further remind us that the very notion of a unified 'receiving society' is a fiction that erases internal differences of class, gender, race, and region. Favell (2003) makes a similar point: European integration research often reproduces the national binaries it claims to move beyond by assuming a stable social core into which migrants must fit. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) call this methodological nationalism, the tendency to treat the nation-state as the natural container of social life. In reality, belonging is continuously negotiated across overlapping social, professional, and spatial fields. Integration should not be seen as a linear entrance into a fixed home but as an ongoing process of boundary-making and unmaking that involves everyone, migrants and non-migrants alike.

Recent empirical work further shows how these hierarchical logics are reproduced in national policy contexts. Poelen (2025), for instance, illustrates how this exclusionary logic materialises in Dutch institutions. In her study of homemaking among displaced women, she finds that immigration and integration policies often follow a 'nation-as-home' logic. Newcomers may be invited into certain parts of public life but remain treated as conditional guests. Inclusion therefore works as a form of controlled access: migrants are allowed in, but rarely on equal or lasting terms. This institutional shaping of belonging reveals how integration policies can reproduce the very hierarchies they claim to overcome. I return to the implications of this 'nation-as-home' logic for migrants' sense of belonging in the next chapter.

Klarenbeek (2019) translates these critiques into a structured analysis of how 'two-way integration' is used in policy and academic debates. She identifies three interpretations:

1. Two-way integration as a descriptive effect: migration inevitably changes society, for example through economic activity or cultural exchange. In this view, change happens naturally but there is no real expectation that the host society should adapt.
2. Two-way integration as a form of facilitation: the host society sets the norms but helps migrants adjust to them, acting as a supportive host.
3. Two-way integration as genuine reciprocity: newcomers and the host society both adapt and learn from one another, creating new shared norms and practices. In this sense, integration becomes a truly mutual and transformative process that changes society itself.

A further debate concerns the so-called integration paradox. Research has shown that migrants who are relatively well educated, employed, or socially active report more frequent experiences of discrimination and exclusion (Buijs, Demant & Hamdy, 2006; De Vroome et al., 2014; Huijink & Dagevos, 2012; Verkuyten, 2016). In other words, social mobility and participation do not automatically foster a stronger sense of belonging; in some cases, they heighten awareness of inequality. Rather than a true paradox, this may reflect the role of intervening factors such as higher standards and expectations regarding equal treatment. Migrants in stronger social and professional positions may also feel more entitled to claim such standards or negotiate them within their work and social environments. In that sense, greater awareness of exclusion may arise not despite, but precisely because of, higher participation and social mobility. Verkuyten (2016) and Geurts et al. (2019) attribute this dynamic to the theory of rising expectations: the higher one's social and educational position, the greater the expectation of equal treatment. When those expectations are not met, the resulting disappointment is felt more sharply. This perspective offers valuable insight into how rising expectations can sharpen the perception of inequality. At the same time, it risks implying a divide between highly and less educated migrants. The point is not that lower-educated groups have fewer claims to equality, but that higher-educated migrants often have more resources – and feel a greater freedom and right – to recognize and articulate injustice when they encounter it. In that sense, the integration paradox reveals both how expectations of equality vary and how limited the scope for inclusion often remains. Finally, a sense of belonging should not be tied to someone's level of education or type of work: it is a basic right of social inclusion and democratic equality, and the feeling of being accepted and valued as part of society should be available to everyone.

Transnationalism

Building on these critiques, scholars such as Faist, Fauser and Reisenauer (2013) and Vertovec (2009) introduced what is often called the transnational turn in migration studies. This perspective moves beyond national frameworks and sees migration as a process that unfolds across different societies rather than only within one. It focuses on how migrants maintain cross-border ties through family relations,

work, communication and political or cultural involvement. These connections show that migration is not only about movement from one country to another but also about the ways people remain linked to several places at the same time. Faist, Fauser and Reisenauer (2013) describe these ongoing connections as transnational social spaces, networks and relationships that link individuals and institutions across national borders. Within these spaces, migrants can participate simultaneously in the economic, political and social life of more than one country. This perspective highlights simultaneous embeddedness, meaning that migrants' lives are shaped by multiple contexts at once. Vertovec (2009) similarly highlights the idea of simultaneity, meaning that migrants' identities and daily practices can be shaped by different contexts at the same time. From this point of view, integration and transnationalism are not opposites but overlapping processes. A newcomer may become active and engaged in the host society while also maintaining ties and commitments elsewhere. The transnational turn therefore challenges the assumption that successful integration means full and permanent settlement within a single national community. Instead, it encourages a broader understanding of belonging that recognises how people live their lives across borders and develop attachments to more than one place. Such transnational perspectives are also crucial for understanding contemporary diasporic realities. Some scholars illustrate how diaspora communities negotiate identity and participation across multiple social and political fields (Çelik, 2022; Choenni, 2022), while Penninx (2022) and Uunk (2022) emphasise that integration and transnational engagement often occur simultaneously rather than sequentially.

Labour market integration

The debates discussed above show that integration is not a single or neutral process, but one shaped by power, recognition, and the boundaries of the nation-state. The transnational perspective adds that migrants' lives and resources often extend across borders, yet their opportunities still depend on how institutions value these resources in specific local contexts. The labour market is one of the key arenas where these tensions become visible in practice. For migrant teachers, this means that integration is not simply about employment, but about whether their skills, qualifications, and experiences are recognised as valuable within the structures of the host society.

Coletti and Pasini (2023) argue that workplace integration depends on processes of mutual accommodation rather than one-sided adjustment. They identify four social mechanisms that structure this process in practice. The first mechanism is actor certification, which occurs when a person or organization gains formal recognition or approval from a key external actor, such as a government body or institutional leader. This form of endorsement enhances credibility and fosters trust, making others more willing to cooperate. The second social mechanism is acceptance, referring to the development of a bond between different groups. Through mutual engagement and problem-solving, groups can build

familiarity and positively influence each other's behaviour. The third social mechanism is reciprocity, the tendency to return a favour or respond in kind when one receives help or support. The fourth mechanism is performance feedback. In this process, participants set clear goals and evaluate progress against them. Regular feedback enables learning and continuous improvement (Coletti & Pasini, 2023). These mechanisms make it possible to see workplace integration as a relational process that involves more than just 'placing' a migrant worker into an organisation. They show how recognition, legitimacy, and authority are negotiated in interaction. At the same time, they also expose how fragile this process can be for newcomers.

Reciprocity, for example, is never neutral. What counts as an appropriate return gesture is culturally defined and socially policed, reflecting moral expectations about gratitude, loyalty, and contribution that are unevenly distributed across groups. Drawing on their study of integration workers in the Nordic welfare context, Ramsøy and Suter (2024) show that reciprocity often functions as an implicit moral code. Newcomers are expected to demonstrate willingness, effort, and thankfulness, whereas established insiders are rarely subjected to the same evaluative gaze. Acts of giving back thus become symbolic confirmations of belonging, while simultaneously reinforcing hierarchical boundaries between those who integrate and those who judge integration. Thus, reciprocity functions as a subtle form of moral regulation, sustaining asymmetrical relations of power even under the rhetoric of equality. Similarly, Mitterbacher, Fleiß and Palan (2024) argue that organisational language frequently frames reciprocity as balanced but in practice, the stakes are profoundly uneven. They suggest that reciprocity has become a governing principle within migration regimes, where migrants are encouraged to participate only insofar as they contribute economically and socially in ways that meet the expectations of host institutions. However, the capacity to define what counts as a meaningful contribution rests almost entirely with employers and receiving societies. Migrant workers, by contrast, have limited agency to demand equivalent recognition or returns for their labour. What is portrayed as a fair exchange thus conceals a structural imbalance in which migrants shoulder greater risks if they fail to live up to dominant standards of value and productivity.

For migrant teachers, whose position is at the core of this research, this means that individual professional development is not enough. Access to the profession depends on a chain of actors who can either open or foreclose pathways. Governments must ensure that qualification recognition procedures are intelligible and accessible, school boards and school leaders must be willing to adjust hiring, induction, and mentoring practices, and colleagues must create space for knowledge exchange rather than assuming a deficit position. In this light, co-production should not be seen merely as migrants' participation in predefined structures, but as a process through which organisations themselves become responsive, self-reflective, and accountable for the conditions that shape inclusion (Schmitt et al. 2023).

Who holds responsibility in practice is thus further complicated by the fact that workplace integration does not operate on a single scale. Van Riemsdijk and Basford (2021), in their study of foreign engineers in Norway's oil and gas sector, show that labour integration is multi-actor, multi-level, and multi-directional. Their study mapped the range of actors involved in long-term workplace integration and analysed how relationships between them shape outcomes. They conclude that labour market integration is not simply a two-way process but a multi-actor, multi-level, and multi-directional one. Integration unfolds simultaneously at international, national, local, and individual levels, engaging a wide variety of actors. National governments set the rules for admission and residence, while local authorities help newcomers settle and access basic services. Companies and their HR departments handle recruitment, onboarding, and the creation of an inclusive workplace culture. Intermediary organizations play a bridging role by supporting cross-border mobility and matching employers with international talent. Finally, voluntary and community networks offer migrants social connections and professional support, helping them build a sense of belonging. The study shows that while national governments primarily regulate inflows, they invest little in the long-term integration of highly skilled migrants, creating a policy gap often filled by private and local actors. Companies, managers, and colleagues therefore play a central role in helping newcomers find their place at work. They may do so by organizing onboarding programs, mentoring or buddy systems, language training, and social activities that support inclusion. However, the quality and extent of these measures differ widely between workplaces, depending on available resources and the level of commitment and knowledge to diversity and inclusion. At the same time, highly skilled migrants possess substantial agency. Their language proficiency, family circumstances, age, and social networks influence not only their own career trajectories and sense of belonging but can also drive broader improvements in company practices or local services (Van Riemsdijk & Basford, 2021). The research highlights that successful integration depends on coordinated efforts and ongoing alignment across all these levels and actors. Employers, governments, and civil society organizations need to adapt their policies, routines, and expectations with flexibility, while recognizing that integration is a shared responsibility in which migrants themselves play an active and shaping role. This multi-level view helps clarify two things that are central to this thesis. First, integration in the labour market is not simply a dyadic relation between 'migrant' and 'host,' despite how it is often framed. It is produced through negotiated alignments between policies, organisations, and people across different levels. Second, responsibility is often displaced. National authorities control inflow but invest little in long-term inclusion. The burden of making integration work is pushed downwards, towards local institutions and individual workplaces, and then further onto the migrant herself. This reproduces the broader pattern described earlier: access is offered, but on terms that remain externally set and continuously monitored.

The question, then, is not only whether migrants enter the labour market, but whether the structures they enter allow them to act as full professionals. This is where Bourdieu's work becomes relevant. Bourdieu

(1986) argues that social position is shaped by access to, and recognition of, different forms of capital: economic capital (material resources), cultural capital (knowledge, credentials, linguistic and pedagogical repertoire), social capital (networks and relationships), and symbolic capital (status and legitimacy). These forms of capital only function as capital within a given social field if that field recognises them as valuable. From a transnational perspective, this recognition process becomes even more complex. As Faist, Fauser and Reisenauer (2013) explain, migrants operate within transnational social spaces where resources, skills, and networks circulate across borders but acquire different meanings and value depending on local contexts. For migrant teachers, this means that prior qualifications, pedagogical experience, and classroom authority do not automatically count in the Dutch educational field. They must first be translated into locally recognisable, and institutionally acceptable, forms.

To translate these theoretical insights into integration policy and practice, the model developed by Ager and Strang (2008) offers a useful complementary framework. Rather than focusing on abstract power relations, Ager and Strang identify ten key domains that shape actual participation, such as employment, housing, education, social connections and rights. Where Bourdieu helps explain why some forms of capital are not recognised, Ager and Strang make visible which concrete conditions enable participation in spite of that. They work with the notion of 'opportunity structures,' which refers to the institutional and policy environments that make access possible, or block it. These domains are mutually reinforcing. Progress in one domain can support progress in another, but setbacks in a single area can stall the entire process (Ager & Strang, 2008; Penninx, 2019). A migrant teacher may have strong linguistic competence in Dutch and perform well in the classroom, but without secure residence status or support from within the school team, sustainable integration remains precarious. Unlike metaphors such as 'gateways' or 'windows of opportunity,' which imply temporary openings, opportunity structures capture how different mechanisms of inclusion may reinforce or, at times, conflict with each other. The idea of opportunity structures is crucial for this thesis for two reasons. First, it ties labour market integration directly to the specific institutional setting of schools. Programmes such as Wereldburgers voor de Klas can be understood as designed opportunity structures: temporary, semi-protected spaces in which migrant teachers are able to translate their capital, rebuild confidence, and re-enter the profession in a controlled way. Second, it makes clear that the success of such programmes is limited if the surrounding structures do not shift with them. Without changes in recruitment norms, in recognition procedures, in mentoring culture, and in how 'good teaching' is defined, these programmes risk preparing migrant teachers for a professional field that still does not fully accept them. In that sense, labour market integration in education should not be read as 'getting migrant teachers into schools,' but as the ongoing negotiation of who is allowed to be recognised as a teacher, on what terms, and with what degree of stability. This argument will return in the discussion of schools as social fields, and again

in the chapter on belonging, where I analyse how these institutional negotiations are experienced in practice as precarious forms of inclusion.

From integration to inclusion

The critiques about 'two-way integration' discussed above have led many scholars and policymakers to shift from the language of integration to that of inclusion. Whereas integration typically starts from a bounded understanding of the nation and its presumed cultural core, inclusion seeks to move beyond this framework by placing equality, participation, and mutual recognition at the centre. As Carrera (2005) argues in his analysis of European integration policy, integration should be understood as a process of inclusion that actively combats social exclusion. This shift implies moving from conditional belonging – where acceptance depends on adaptation – to structural belonging, in which equal rights and opportunities are guaranteed regardless of origin or status. Inclusion therefore redirects attention away from how migrants fit into an existing social order and towards how that order itself must change to ensure equality and participation for all.

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (2024) makes this distinction clear: integration refers to a two-way process of mutual adaptation, while inclusion concerns the removal of structural barriers that hinder equal access to rights and opportunities. The focus thus shifts from behavioural adjustment to institutional reform. In this sense, inclusion represents a normative and political framework that goes beyond integration. It calls not only for the recognition of migrants as participants, but also for the transformation of the receiving society, its power relations, institutions, and normative boundaries.

At the same time, inclusion is not a simple replacement for integration. Research by Omanović and Langley (2021) on workplace socialisation shows that inclusion revolves around the tension between belonging and being different. Inclusion does not mean that differences disappear, but that diversity is recognised as valuable. Identity-blind notions of equality can, paradoxically, reproduce inequality when differences in experience and position are ignored. Similarly, Giannetto and Van der Maarel (2024) demonstrate in their study of migrants in rural areas that formal inclusion policies often coexist with social invisibility: migrants contribute economically, yet remain outside the symbolic boundaries of local communities. Inclusion should therefore be understood as a continuous process of recognition, visibility, and equal participation. It is not a fixed endpoint, but a democratic practice in motion.

From this perspective, the shift from integration to inclusion marks a fundamental reorientation. The key question moves from how migrants can become part of society to how societies can organise themselves inclusively. This also challenges the earlier discussed 'nation-as-home' logic: inclusion

implies shared ownership of that home rather than a hierarchical relationship between host and guest. Belonging is no longer granted by the majority but continuously co-constructed through everyday encounters, policy practices, and institutional arrangements. In this sense, inclusion is not the final stage of integration but its political and ethical reinvention. This shift also opens the way to a deeper engagement with the concept of belonging, which I discuss in the next part of this chapter. Whereas inclusion primarily refers to formal structures of access, participation, and equality, belonging speaks to the lived experience of home, recognition, and emotional connection. Inclusion can therefore be seen as the institutional precondition for belonging, but not its guarantee: one may be formally included and yet still not feel at home.

2.2 Belonging as part of inclusion

To belong, feeling at home and find a place to root yourself again. Integration is not simply about adapting or participating; it is about building meaningful connections and being recognized as part of a shared society. Where integration is often approached as an institutional goal and measured via participation, belonging shifts the focus to lived experience. Belonging is not something the state can simply award; it is something negotiated, withheld, and co-created in everyday interactions. This section therefore treats belonging not as a 'soft outcome' of integration, but as a parallel lens that reveals how formally inclusive structures may still produce conditional or temporary forms of inclusion.

Belonging is thus understood as a crucial dimension of inclusion. Inclusion refers to the need for both space and appreciation for authenticity and individuality, while also fostering a sense of belonging and being part of something (Shore et al., 2011; Randel et al., 2018; Jansen et al., 2015). As the recent TU Delft survey on perceptions of inclusion (Çelik, van Sabajooel & Sabajo, 2023) demonstrates, inclusion involves more than numerical diversity. It depends on positive, respectful everyday interactions, psychological safety, and the recognition of differences as strengths. Their study shows that employees who feel included experience higher well-being, trust, and commitment to the organisation, whereas the absence of inclusion often manifests through subtle forms of exclusion, such as gossip, lack of recognition, or being left out of projects.

Inclusion therefore creates the organisational and relational conditions that make belonging possible. It is not limited to policy or representation but requires an ongoing cultural effort: leadership that values difference, transparent complaint procedures, and a safe environment where authenticity is appreciated (Çelik et al., 2023). Belonging can thus be seen as the lived, emotional core of inclusion, where individuals not only have access to spaces but feel recognised and valued within them.

As Keulemans and Cornelissen (2024) remind us, the desire to belong is not limited to migrants alone; it speaks to a universal human experience of searching for acceptance and a sense of home. Yet for those who have crossed borders, the question of belonging becomes especially charged, as it involves negotiating between different cultural, professional, and emotional worlds. In recent years, the notion of belonging has gained significant attention across disciplines, ranging from psychology to sociology and cultural studies. Diverse literature has sought to unpack the meaning of belonging and the ways in which it is produced, claimed and sometimes denied.

Belonging as a fundamental human need

In psychology, Baumeister and Leary argue that 'human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments' (1995, p. 522). Their influential workplaces this need on the same level as other fundamental human drives such as safety and self-esteem. When people are unable to meet this need, they may experience serious cognitive, emotional, and even physical consequences. In a similar way, Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory identifies the need for supportive and close relationships as one of three basic psychological needs, together with autonomy and competence. Belonging is therefore not a luxury or a secondary concern, but a core human need that shapes wellbeing, motivation, and participation. This understanding provides an important foundation for exploring belonging in specific contexts, including migration and professional life. Cultural theorist Elspeth Probyn (1996) extends this idea by viewing belonging not as a fixed state of identity but as a continuous process of desire and attachment. Her view shows that belonging is less about being securely placed somewhere, and more about the ongoing desire to connect and to become:

> [Belonging] captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state. (p.19)

At the same time, the 'somewhere' that Probyn refers to can take many forms. Belonging is rarely confined to a single place or community, but often unfolds across different scales and spheres of life, ranging from local and professional to transnational and emotional attachments. For many who have crossed borders, belonging thus involves finding balance between multiple homes, connections, and modes of becoming. This connects to research on homemaking (Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2016; Poelen, 2025), which sees belonging as something people create through their daily routines, relationships, and use of space. The idea of homemaking shows how migrants build small zones of comfort and safety in places, even when these spaces only partly or temporarily include them. Looking

at integration through the lens of homemaking makes clear that 'home' is not something automatically achieved, but something that must be constantly negotiated and shaped.

Conceptual ambiguities

Although most scholars agree that belonging plays a vital role in social and emotional life, the concept itself remains difficult to define. As Antonsich (2010) points out, belonging is often left undefined or used interchangeably with ideas such as identity or citizenship. This lack of clarity makes it challenging to study belonging systematically. Yet the concept cannot be reduced to either of these related terms. Identity is mainly concerned with how individuals see themselves and are seen by others, while citizenship refers to the formal status of membership, rights, and responsibilities within a political community. Belonging, in contrast, captures the more personal and emotional dimensions of inclusion, recognition, and feeling 'at home' in a social world (Antonisch, 2010). This distinction matters because belonging operates on a different level of human experience. A person may hold full legal citizenship yet still feel excluded or alienated, while someone without official recognition may nonetheless experience a deep sense of attachment to a place or community. Scholars such as Lemon (2023), Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) and Skey (2013) emphasize that belonging involves more than individual self-identification, because it is also about a sense of embeddedness and participation in a shared social fabric. The frequent use of home as a metaphor reflects this emotional and symbolic dimension. Here, home does not necessarily refer to a physical place or location but rather to a state of familiarity, safety, and acceptance (Antonsich, 2010; Duyvendak, 2011). As Allen et al. (2022) argue, the paradox lies in the fact that its importance is widely acknowledged, yet scholars and practitioners still struggle to agree on how to conceptualize, measure, or meaningfully promote belonging in everyday and institutional contexts.

Dimensions of belonging

In response to the conceptual ambiguity surrounding belonging, several scholars have proposed typologies and multidimensional frameworks designed to unpack the various layers through which belonging is constructed. These approaches are useful in migration and education research, as they help to identify and compare the various ways people may feel included or excluded.

Yuval-Davis (2006) offers a crucial distinction between psychological belonging and the politics of belonging. Psychological belonging refers to an individual's personal sense of attachment and the feeling of being at home within a group, place, or community. The politics of belonging, on the other

hand, captures the broader social and institutional mechanisms that regulate who is included or excluded, and who is recognized as a legitimate member. This distinction reminds us that belonging is never just an individual experience: it is always shaped by power relations and political decisions. This framework provides a useful lens for understanding Vasta's (2013) argument that contemporary migration debates often blur the lines between belonging, national identity, and social cohesion. In these discussions, social cohesion is frequently portrayed as the outcome of a unified society built around 'common values' and a shared civic culture. While such ideas appear to encourage solidarity, they often carry an assimilative logic, that is, the unspoken assumption that migrants can only belong if they adopt the dominant group's values and norms. Viewed through Yuval-Davis's perspective, it becomes evident that the politics of belonging transforms the meaning of belonging itself. Rather than centering on mutual recognition and the acceptance of difference, belonging in this context turns into a normative process of alignment, a continuous pressure to approximate the dominant group's values and norms, rather than a measurable end state of 'sameness.'

Building on similar concerns, Antonsich (2010) distinguishes between place-belongingness and the politics of belonging. Place-belongingness refers to the affective sense of being 'at home' in a particular location. It highlights the embodied and emotional dimensions of attachment to place and draws attention to the everyday routines, memories, and social relations through which individuals establish comfort and familiarity. This perspective aligns closely with migration research that emphasises how feelings of home are not abstract but are lived and enacted through daily practices. In this context, the notion of homemaking developed by Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2016) offers a valuable extension. They argue that integration should not only be understood as structural participation but also as a relational process of place-based attachment, in which migrants actively transform spaces into places of familiarity and comfort. Homemaking captures both the personal effort to feel at home and the shared negotiation of recognition at a societal level. It foregrounds the affective and emotional labor invested in creating stability and rootedness within new environments. In later work, Boccagni and Bonfanti (2023) expand on this perspective by exploring how homemaking unfolds within concrete domestic spaces, often under conditions of marginalisation and exclusion. They demonstrate how migrants use objects, routines, and everyday interactions to cultivate a sense of home even in precarious housing situations. At the same time, they emphasise that homemaking is never purely private but is embedded within wider structures of inequality and political struggles over recognition and rights.

Allen et al. (2022) argue that belonging should be understood as a dynamic construct: not a fixed or one-dimensional state, but a process that continually evolves through the interaction between individuals and their social environment. To make this more concrete, they identify four interrelated components: competences, opportunities, motivations, and perceptions. Competences refer to the social, cultural, and emotional skills that people use to form connections and build relationships. These include both 'hard'

skills such as language proficiency and familiarity with cultural codes, and 'soft' skills such as empathy, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. While such competences help individuals find their footing, they can also prove insufficient when the surrounding context limits space for diversity and inclusion. Opportunities concern the structural conditions that make participation and interaction possible. Belonging does not develop in isolation, but emerges within institutions such as schools, workplaces, and communities, which can either facilitate or restrict access. In practice, this invites the question of which social positions, networks, and material resources are available to foster a sense of belonging. Without these opportunities, even highly motivated individuals may struggle to build stable and meaningful attachments. Motivations point to the inner drive to belong. Having the necessary skills and opportunities is not enough; individuals must also desire to connect and engage with others. Motivation, however, is fluid. It varies across individuals and changes over time. For instance, someone may feel deeply committed to contributing to a community or profession, yet this drive can fade if their efforts are met with indifference or exclusion. Finally, perceptions capture the subjective experience of inclusion and exclusion. Even when competences and opportunities are present, what ultimately matters is how individuals feel. Do they experience recognition, acceptance, and appreciation, or do they feel marginalised and unseen? Perceptions remind us that belonging is always partly a matter of interpretation, shaped by past experiences, expectations, and the everyday interactions that affirm or challenge one's sense of being part of a community. Yet, paradoxically, the more familiar you become with a culture, the more you may notice its boundaries. As Ahmed (2014) reminds us, greater awareness can expose new layers of difference to navigate, making belonging feel less certain rather than more secure. Belonging, then, is never something you simply achieve once and for all, but something you keep negotiating as you move through different contexts and moments in time.

What makes the model of Allen et al. (2022) particularly valuable is that it translates belonging into something concrete and researchable. It offers a set of tools to examine, in a systematic way, the dimensions that strengthen or undermine people's sense of belonging. However, the model also has its limitations. When applied too narrowly through a psychological or individualist lens, there is a risk that attention shifts towards personal adjustment and motivation, while power relations, exclusion, and inequality recede into the background. This is precisely the concern raised by Yuval-Davis (2006) and Antonsich (2010), who stress that belonging is always embedded in wider processes of recognition and boundary-making. To fully understand belonging, Allen et al.'s framework therefore needs to be complemented by these critical perspectives. Only by acknowledging the political and societal dimensions of belonging can we adequately address the tension between personal experience and structural forms of exclusion.

<u>Five dimensions of belonging as a (migrant) teacher</u>

While these theoretical perspectives help to conceptualize belonging in broad and multidimensional terms, more recent studies have sought to translate such insights into specific professional and institutional settings. In the context of education, the recent scoping review by Wator, Patrick and Yip (2025) makes an important contribution to understanding teacher belonging. Their study shows that belonging is a key factor influencing teachers' wellbeing, motivation, and professional sustainability. First, Wator et al. (2025) distinguish between two complementary forms of belonging: workplace belonging and professional belonging. Workplace belonging refers to the everyday experience of support, trust, and recognition within the school environment. Professional belonging, by contrast, refers to the extent to which teachers identify with the teaching profession as a whole, including its values, networks, and shared purpose. This distinction shows that belonging goes beyond job satisfaction or enjoyment, as it reflects a deeper sense of legitimacy, connection, and meaning in one's professional life.

In addition, Wator et al. (2025) identify five recurring dimensions that foster or undermine belonging as a teacher:

- *Collegial interaction* refers to collaboration, knowledge-sharing and informal support, all of which strongly contribute to trust and safety. Small gestures, such as an invitation to prepare lessons together or a casual talk in the staffroom, act as tangible signals of inclusion. Conversely, when conflict, gossip or other forms of exclusion occur, teachers experience a sharp decline in belonging.
- *Shared values* form the second dimension. Teachers feel more connected to their school when they perceive a common mission, for example, striving for educational equity or embracing diversity. The absence of shared values can lead to fragmentation and disconnection.
- The third dimension is *leadership*. Supportive and inclusive leadership legitimises the contributions of all team members, fosters trust and creates space for diversity. In contrast, authoritarian or distrustful leadership heightens insecurity and can undermine belonging.
- *Recognition* encompasses both formal recognitions, in the form of contracts, promotions or certifications, and symbolic appreciation, such as acknowledging unique talents or expertise. Recognition signals that teachers matter and that their contributions are valued. Its absence can foster feelings of marginalisation.
- *Relationships with students* form the fifth dimension. Positive interactions with students are for many teachers a direct source of belonging: the awareness that they make a difference in young people's lives strengthens their professional identity. At the same time, negative experiences, such as micro-aggressions or the constant questioning of authority, can erode belonging.

To provide a clearer overview of how belonging operates within school contexts, Table 2 summarises the five dimensions proposed by Wator et al. (2025). The table highlights for each dimension the factors that enhance belonging as well as those that may threaten it.

Dimension of belonging	Description	Positive indicators	Challenges / risks
1. Collegial interaction	Collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and informal support among staff.	Invitations to collaborate; friendly interactions; shared problem-solving.	Conflict, gossip, or exclusion leading to distrust.
2. Shared values	Sense of a common mission and shared educational purpose.	Collective commitment to equity, diversity, and student wellbeing.	Fragmentation, lack of cohesion or unclear goals.
3. Leadership	Quality and inclusiveness of school leadership and management.	Supportive, trusting, and participatory leadership.	Authoritarian or distrustful leadership undermining security.
4. Recognition	Formal and informal appreciation of teachers' work and identity.	Promotions, acknowledgment of unique expertise, positive feedback.	Lack of appreciation or recognition; feelings of marginalisation.
5. Relationship with students	Quality of teacher–student interactions and emotional connection.	Mutual respect; seeing impact on students' growth and learning.	Disrespect, microaggressions, or persistent challenges to authority.

Table 2: *Five dimensions of belonging as a teacher (Adapted from Wator et al., 2025).*

Building on these perspectives, this study brings together the ideas of Yuval-Davis (2006) and Antonsich (2010) with the analytical framework developed by Wator et al. (2025). Yuval-Davis's distinction between psychological belonging and the politics of belonging shows that individual feelings of attachment are always linked to wider social and institutional processes that define who is included or excluded. Antonsich's concept of place-belongingness adds an important spatial and experiential layer, reminding us that belonging is something people live and create through their everyday environments. Together, these perspectives help to capture the personal, relational, and structural dimensions through which belonging takes shape. With this foundation in mind, Wator et al.'s framework offers a practical way to translate these ideas into the educational context. Their five dimensions of teacher belonging make it possible to explore how belonging is experienced, sustained, or challenged in teachers' professional lives.

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2.3 School as social field of integration and place-making

In this study, schools are approached as social fields of integration and place-making. The school constitutes a unique and complex space. It is at once a workplace, a learning environment, a meeting place, and a culturally and politically sensitive arena. In many ways, a school can be seen as a small society. As a microcosm of society, classrooms and staff rooms are spaces where knowledge is exchanged, power is negotiated, politics is discussed, and identities are shaped. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the school can be understood as a social field with its own rules, hierarchies, and forms of capital. Within this field, power relations and the value attached to different forms of capital determine who gains access to recognition and opportunity, and who is left on the margins (Bathmaker, 2015; Bagley & Fargas-Malet, 2023; Williams & Choudry, 2016). As Collins and Coleman (2008) point out, the school is also a socio-spatial environment where these dynamics become visible not only in relationships but also in the organisation of space and time. Buildings, classrooms, hallways, and playgrounds are not neutral settings but are infused with routines, expectations, and power structures that shape behaviour and identity. The daily rhythm of bells, schedules, and supervision, as well as the territories students establish for themselves, reveal how discipline and resistance coexist in everyday school life. In this sense, the school operates both as an instrument of state integration policy and as a lived social world. Through hiring rules, credential recognition, language norms, and performance standards, it reproduces the state's logic of who is considered a legitimate teacher. At the same time, it is a site where teachers actively negotiate belonging and homemaking in everyday interactions. This dual role makes the school an ideal place to study the interlay and tensions between institutional inclusion (being formally accepted and recognised by the system) and felt inclusion (experiencing oneself as at home and valued within that system). In line with transnational and intersectional perspectives on migration (Faist, Fauser & Reisenauer, 2013; Vertovec, 2009; Elahi, Trienekens & Ramsoedh, 2022), schools can thus be seen as local arenas where global processes of belonging and identity formation become tangible.

At the same time, the meaning of the school extends beyond its physical boundaries. As a meeting point for parents, community members, and successive generations of pupils, it serves as a centre of social life and public discourse where questions of citizenship, equality, and diversity are continuously negotiated (Collins & Coleman, 2008). Viewing the school as a social field makes it clear that the integration and professional development of migrant teachers are not only questions of formal policy or labour market access, but also of the meanings attached to the school as a place. In this regard, Klarenbeek's (2021) critical lens is particularly relevant. She argues that so-called 'two-way' integration often remains asymmetrical in practice. Schools, too, can function as spaces where migrant teachers are primarily expected to adapt to established norms, or, alternatively, as sites of genuine reciprocity where new social practices are co-created with them. Ghorashi (2010) further develops this critique through the notion of the cultural deficit. She argues that discussions about integration in Western Europe, and especially in the Netherlands, often portray migrants as lacking the 'right' cultural values needed to take part fully in society. This way of thinking turns migrants into problems that must be solved, instead of recognising them as people who actively shape social life. It also reinforces a hierarchy in which the dominant, so-called modern culture is seen as normal and neutral, while minority cultures are treated as barriers to integration. In this light, the idea of 'two-way' integration often hides an expectation that adaptation should mainly come from migrants. Focusing on supposed cultural shortcomings diverts attention from structural inequalities and from the need for the host society to change as well. What is framed as 'welcoming' or 'supporting' migrant teachers may, therefore, reproduce these same dynamics. As Hummelstedt, Holm, Sahlström, and Zilliacus (2021) demonstrate, diversity in teacher education is often celebrated rhetorically, yet valued only when it remains instrumental. For instance, when a teacher's background is considered 'useful' for diverse students, rather than as a perspective that could reshape prevailing understandings of good teaching. In such contexts, difference is tolerated rather than recognised as transformative. This focus on perceived cultural shortcomings diverts attention from the structural inequalities within educational institutions and from the need for the host society itself to change.

Gilmartin & Dagg (2021) add a valuable dimension by bringing an explicitly spatial perspective to the study of integration. While much of the literature approaches integration in terms of rights, opportunities, or labour market participation, they focus on how migrants and established communities actively co-create places together. Understanding integration as making place highlights that integration is not about entering a pre-existing space, but about participating in a shared process of place-making in which meanings, uses, and symbols are negotiated. A crucial insight is that a space only becomes a place when social relationships and emotional attachments accompany physical presence (Gilmartin & Dagg, 2021). For migrant teachers, this means that their sense of belonging within a school depends not only on employment or formal recognition but also on how they can participate in creating the social and symbolic meanings of that place. This focus on place-making aligns with the broader theoretical

contributions of Lefebvre and Massey. Lefebvre (1991) emphasises that space is never neutral or self-evident but always socially produced. Spaces such as classrooms or staff meetings are embedded in power relations and institutional routines: who sets the agenda, who is invited to speak, who holds the keys to the building? These seemingly everyday practices reveal how space is constructed through power and social boundaries. Massey (2005) further reminds us that places are relational and constantly evolving. What counts as an important or meaningful place is itself shaped by social and institutional definitions of relevance, often reflecting whose experiences and perspectives are valued within a given context. A school, therefore, is not a static backdrop but a dynamic social environment that changes as new teachers, students, and perspectives enter. From the perspective of Ager and Strang (2008), these processes of place-making are also shaped by broader structural conditions, such as access to rights, recognition of qualifications, and opportunities to build professional networks. Without these enabling conditions, the potential for genuine co-creation remains limited.

Pedagogical dimension and knowledge production

In addition to its social dimensions, the school also carries a strong pedagogical dimension. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire (2014) argues that education is never neutral. It can either reproduce inequality by continually measuring individuals or groups against their perceived deficits, or it can serve as an emancipatory practice that opens space for dialogue and more equal forms of knowledge creation. For migrant teachers, this means that schools can either reinforce their supposed position of 'lack' or become genuine learning environments where their experiences and expertise are actively recognised and valued. In the latter case, the school becomes a place where not only students but also staff learn and grow through diversity. The relevance of Freire's ideas also emerges from research on the experiences of migrant teachers working in new educational contexts. Fletcher-Lambert (2017), for instance, describes a Pedagogy of the Transplanted, showing how Jamaican teachers who migrated to the United States carried their pedagogical traditions with them but had to adapt to an education system shaped by standardised curricula and normative expectations. While they sought to introduce their own teaching approaches, they often faced pressure to conform. Their experiences reveal how host societies define the boundaries of what counts as legitimate knowledge and pedagogy, leaving limited space for co-creation. From a Freirean perspective, this can be understood as a form of pedagogical oppression, in which the voices and experiences of migrant teachers are marginalised rather than recognised as valuable sources of insight. Benson (2019) offers a closer look at these dynamics within the classroom. He shows how accents, language differences, and cultural references influence everyday interactions between migrant teachers and their students. At times, such encounters triggered microaggressions or jokes that undermined teachers' authority. In other moments, they created opportunities for dialogue and intercultural learning. Migrant teachers were shown to navigate these tensions continuously,

balancing resistance to stereotyping with the desire to connect and make their cultural backgrounds an asset in teaching.

Even when Freire is not used as an explicit theoretical framework, these findings resonate strongly with his critique of power asymmetries in education. The key issue is not only what is taught, but also who is recognised as a legitimate producer of knowledge. Where schools create space for dialogue and negotiation, a form of critical consciousness (conscientização) begins to develop, which is precisely the process Freire saw as central to emancipatory education.

2.4 In-between spaces

Building on the idea of the school as a social field of integration and place-making, it becomes clear that for many migrant teachers this field is not experienced as a fixed or stable environment, but rather as an 'in-between' space. The notion of liminality captures this transitional and often uncertain position. Turner (2017) introduced the concept to describe the in-between phases of social transition, where individuals find themselves moving from one state to another, leaving behind a previous identity but have not yet fully entered a new one. This ongoing process of adjustment also connects to the idea of transnationalism, since migrant teachers' identities and professional practices are shaped across different national, cultural, and institutional contexts. In this way, their experience of liminality is not only about transition, but also about living and working between multiple worlds. It reflects a continuous reshaping of belonging and professional identity across borders. For migrant teachers, this liminal state is rarely a simple or temporary phase. It often becomes a complex double transition: they must learn to connect with a new society and professional culture, while at the same time re-evaluating the relevance of their previous knowledge, teaching practices, and professional norms (Bense, 2012; Jhagroo, 2016; Yip 2023, Yip & Saito, 2024). This dual process underscores that belonging and professional identity are not simply attained through adaptation, but continually redefined through negotiation across overlapping social and institutional contexts.

In migration studies, the concept has been further developed by scholars such as Erel (2010), who demonstrated that migrants in liminal positions do not simply lose or retain their social and cultural capital but must often translate it into new contexts. Diplomas, work experience, and pedagogical knowledge that held unquestioned value in the country of origin are reassessed and sometimes devalued in the new setting. Yet liminality can also create room for renewal, offering a space to revalue one's capital and to develop new strategies and identities. Liminality is therefore not only a time of uncertainty but also of creativity and possibility. Savickas and Porfeli (2012) connect their theory of career construction to the idea of transitional, or liminal, phases as central to professional development. In

developing the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS), they operationalised this process through four psychosocial resources: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. These resources enable individuals to navigate career transitions. Contexts such as training programmes, internships, and requalification schemes can thus be seen as designed liminal spaces, intentionally structured to help people strengthen these adaptive capacities, redefine their professional identities, and develop a new habitus. While Turner (2017) emphasised spontaneous or ritual forms of liminality, Savickas and Porfeli (2012) show that institutions can deliberately design such spaces to foster adaptability and transformation.

For migrant teachers, this idea is particularly relevant. Ennerberg and Economou (2022) observe that requalification and additional training often lead to long periods of uncertainty and delay. As a result, migrant teachers frequently find themselves in a liminal position, neither fully integrated into the profession nor entirely excluded from it. Training programmes can thus be understood as designed in-between spaces: institutionally organised settings in which migrants can translate and revalue their skills, cultural and social capital (Erel, 2010), and develop new forms of professional identity and habitus (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Alongside these structured, institutionally designed spaces, Halleh Ghorashi (2006, 2020) identifies another form that is equally significant for this study: dialogical in-between spaces. While training programmes are often temporary and formalised, Ghorashi highlights the spaces that can emerge within organisations themselves, such as schools, when established norms and assumptions are temporarily suspended. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's concept of the public sphere as a space of plurality, Ghorashi conceptualises these in-between spaces as arenas where differences can be openly expressed and where new meanings can emerge through dialogue. In the migration and organisational context, she understands these spaces as moments of encounter and reciprocity, made possible when genuine room is created for difference to be recognised and become productive.

However, Ghorashi also points out that many organisations fall short of this ideal. Too often, they hold on to the image of the 'norm employee' and operate with a deficit logic in which difference is treated as a problem rather than as a potential source of learning. As a result, the possibility of creating genuine in-between spaces remains limited, and migrants continue to be evaluated primarily in terms of perceived shortcomings. A truly dialogical in-between space, by contrast, requires openness, the willingness to question assumptions and to jointly redefine what counts as quality, competence, and equality. For migrant teachers, this means that integration depends not only on their participation in training programmes but also on whether schools themselves act as dialogical in-between spaces. The key question, then, is whether schools provide migrant teachers with the opportunity to share their knowledge, experiences, and pedagogical traditions and to co-create new practices, or whether they continue to assess them against a pre-defined norm.

2.5 Connecting the concepts

To map the context in which this study is situated, I draw on the multi-actor model developed by van Riemsdijk and Basford (2021). Their frame summarises that labour market integration is not a straightforward or two-way process, but a multi-level and multi-directional one shaped by a wide range of actors operating across international, national, local, and individual scales. Adapting this perspective to the case of migrant teachers helps clarifies how various institutions, organisations, and relationships influence their pathways of integration and belonging within the Dutch educational system. In this study, integration is understood primarily as the institutional and structural process that regulates access to the profession, whereas belonging refers to the relational, and experiential embeddedness of migrant teachers once they are part of schools. Table 3 summarises the main actors and institutional scales influencing migrant teachers' pathways of integration and belonging within the Dutch educational system. In this study, integration is therefore not treated as a neutral or linear process of adaptation, but as an institutionalised, power-laden process that regulates access to the teaching profession and monitors the terms on which migrant teachers are allowed to enter. Integration is shaped and enforced by actors such as ministries, credential recognition bodies, municipalities, school boards, and HR managers. It is largely defined from above, and often remains asymmetrical even when described as 'two-way.'

Actor	Scale	Integration (and belonging) function for migrant teachers in the Netherlands
Transnational networks and global education frameworks	International / transnational	These include international teacher mobility agreements, UNESCO and OECD frameworks on teacher mobility, and transnational professional networks that define what counts as 'qualified teaching.' These frameworks shape which forms of teacher capital are seen as legitimate before migrant teachers even enter the Dutch system, and thus set the terms on which they may later claim recognition and belonging.
Country of origin institutions (e.g. ministries of education, disaspora organizations and embassies)	Transnational	Maintain links with migrant teachers' home qualifications and professional identity. They issue or verify credentials, sometimes offer reference letters, and may collaborate in bilateral recognition agreements. For some teachers, these institutions also support continued cultural and linguistic ties, contributing to transnational forms of belonging and capital (Lusis & Bauder, 2010; Joy et al., 2015).
Dutch government and the Ministries of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), and the Ministries of Social Affairs and Employmennt (SZW)	National	Set migration and labour-market policies such as recognition of foreign qualifications, visa/residence procedures, and subsidised teacher re-training or language programmes. Define overall integration and inclusion frameworks that shape migrant teachers' access to work and rights. They therefore determine the formal conditions under which migrant teachers are allowed to enter, but not necessarily whether they will later be treated as equal professionals in everyday school life.
National credential recognition and licensing agencies (DUO / Nuffic)	National	Function as credential evaluation and licensing authorities. DUO manages teacher registration and qualification checks; Nuffic evaluates foreign diplomas. Their assessments determine whether migrant teachers can access re-certification or bridging programmes, shaping their entry into the profession. These assessments operationalise integration by translating previous qualifications into Dutch categories. At the same time, they can indirectly affect belonging by positioning some teachers as 'not yet fully qualified.'
Municipalities	Local	Provide settlement and integration support, such as housing, social services, childcare, and Dutch-language training (NT2). Municipalities coordinate local 'inburgering' trajectories and connect newcomers to regional labour-market networks, including education jobs. They thus create enabling or constraining conditions (Ager & Strang, 2008) for labour market entry, which in turn shape how stable and confident teachers can feel when they begin working.
Transition programmes (e.g., Wereldburgers voor de Klas)	Regional / Local	Create designed liminal spaces where groups of migrant teachers can collectively translate their cultural and professional capital into the Dutch context and learn the Dutch language and educational culture. These programmes offer peer support, mentorship, internships, and pedagogical retraining, fostering both labour-market integration and a shared sense of belonging.

Regional education networks	Regional	Responsible for recruitment, placement, and workforce planning across schools. They mediate between national teacher shortages and local hiring needs. Their openness to internationally trained teachers can facilitate structural inclusion. They therefore act as brokers who can either reproduce narrow hiring norms or actively normalise migrant teachers as part of the legitimate labour pool, which affects whether belonging is imaginable from the outset or framed as exceptional.
School boards / individual schools	Local / Organizational	Provide employment, induction, and professional development opportunities. Institutional cultures and HR practices determine whether migrant teachers experience recognition or marginalisation. Schools serve as key sites where belonging is negotiated daily.
School leaders / HR managers	Organizational	Act as gatekeepers in hiring and evaluation. Their perceptions of "quality," "language proficiency," and "cultural fit" influence access to jobs and career progression. Inclusive leadership can actively foster workplace integration, mentorship, and trust.
Fellow teachers	Organizational / interpersonal	Offer (or withhold) social capital through collaboration, mentoring, and informal knowledge exchange. Collegial relationships shape migrant teachers' sense of professional belonging and access to everyday pedagogical norms.
Students at school	Interpersonal	Influence migrant teachers' emotional belonging and identity as educators. Positive interactions affirm recognition and "feeling like a teacher again," while negative stereotypes can reinforce otherness.
Parents and parent representational bodies	Local / interpersonal	Parents influence migrant teachers' sense of belonging through their attitudes, expectations, and communication. Their recognition and trust can affirm teachers' legitimacy and authority, especially when language, culture, or pedagogy differ. Parent associations can also advocate for inclusion, diversity, and equitable representation in school policies. Conversely, lack of trust or cultural stereotyping can reproduce exclusion.
Migrant teachers	Individual / transnational	Central actor who navigates multiple scales, from transnational career histories to local classrooms. Engages in processes of capital translation, habitus adaptation, and belonging-making. Through resilience, reflexivity, and agency, migrant teachers reconstruct their professional identities in the Dutch context.

Table 3: *Multi-actor landscape of integration and belonging among migrant teachers*

Following Klarenbeek (2021), integration is approached here as a 'two-way' process that only becomes genuinely reciprocal when new social practices are co-created, rather than when migrant teachers simply adapt to pre-existing norms. In other words, integration only approaches reciprocity at the moment the field itself changes in response to migrant teachers, not merely when migrant teachers learn to comply. This means that the integration of migrant teachers is not solely about access to employment, but also about recognition, interaction, and the opportunity to actively contribute to redefining the educational field itself. Ager and Strang's (2008) framework helps to clarify the structural conditions that enable or constrain such processes, such as the recognition of qualifications and access to professional networks. These structural conditions form what they call opportunity structures. Without access to rights, recognition, and networks, entry into teaching may be technically possible but remains fragile.

Within this broader structural frame, belonging is understood as the experiential core of integration, but not reducible to it. Although integration is often conceived as a two-way process, in practice it tends to remain state-defined and evaluated through institutional criteria. Belonging, by contrast, reflects the lived perspective of migrants themselves: whether inclusion feels genuine through recognition, legitimacy, and connection. Drawing on Yuval-Davis (2006) and Antonsich (2010), belonging is conceptualised here as a dynamic process at the intersection of personal, institutional, professional, and spatial dimensions. In educational contexts, this takes concrete form in what Wator, Patrick, and Yip (2025) describe as teacher belonging: collegial interaction, shared values, leadership, recognition, and relationships with students. Belonging, then, is not merely an emotion but a lens through which to examine how migrant teachers position themselves - professionally and emotionally - within Dutch education. It captures whether migrant teachers are not only present in schools, but recognised as full teachers with authority, continuity, and a voice in shaping practice.

The school provides a crucial context for these processes. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the school can be seen as a social field in which certain forms of cultural and symbolic capital, such as language proficiency or particular pedagogical knowledge, are valued more highly than others (Bathmaker, 2015). In line with Lefebvre (1991) and Massey (2005), the school is also a socially produced space where power relations and meanings are continuously negotiated and re-negotiated. This spatial and pedagogical dimension resonates with Freire's (2014) view of education as a potentially emancipatory practice: schools can reproduce exclusion, but they can also serve as sites of dialogue and collective knowledge production. In this thesis, the school is therefore treated as the place where formal integration structures and lived belonging intersect and can either reinforce or undermine one another.

This potential for dialogue also resonates with the idea of in-between spaces, which take both institutional and dialogical forms. As Savickas and Porfeli (2012) and Erel (2010) suggest, transition programmes and requalification schemes can be understood as designed liminal spaces: structured environments that help migrant teachers translate and revalue their professional and cultural capital,

rebuild confidence, and reconstruct a professional identity within a new educational context. These programmes create temporary, supportive settings that bridge the gap between exclusion and full participation, allowing teachers to strengthen adaptive capacities and prepare for re-entry into the profession. Complementing these designed forms, Ghorashi (2006, 2020) highlights the importance of dialogical in-between spaces that can emerge within organisations themselves. Unlike formal training contexts, these spaces are relational and spontaneous: they appear when established norms are momentarily suspended and when difference is treated as a resource for mutual learning rather than as a deficit. In schools, such dialogical spaces enable migrant teachers to bring in their pedagogical traditions, experiences, and perspectives as legitimate forms of knowledge. Genuine integration, in this sense, becomes possible not only through formal programmes but through everyday practices of recognition and co-creation within the school community.

By bringing these perspectives together, this study conceptualizes the school as a socio-institutional space in which integration, belonging, and dialogical in-between spaces intersect. Integration provides the structural frame; belonging captures the personal and professional experience; and the school acts as the field in which these processes are enacted. The core analytical move in this thesis is to treat integration and belonging not as interchangeable, but as dynamically related and sometimes tension-filled processes that meet in the everyday reality of the school. The extent to which schools succeed in functioning as dialogical in-between spaces ultimately determines whether migrant teachers can truly participate, contribute, and once again feel at home in their profession.

2.6 Conceptual framework

Building on the theoretical perspectives discussed above, Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. It brings together structural, relational, and individual dimensions to explain how migrant teachers experience integration and belonging within Dutch education. The model assumes that institutional structures, school relationships, and programme support, such as the transition programme Wereldburgers voor de Klas, shape migrant teachers' opportunities for participation. These influences operate through the mediating processes of recognition and professional identity reconstruction, which are dynamically affected by individual agency expressed through resilience, motivation, and self-reflection. Together, these processes determine how teachers negotiate their sense of integration and belonging in the classroom. This framework highlights the interplay between policy, organisational context, and personal experience, positioning migrant teachers not merely as passive recipients of integration but as active agents in re-constructing professional and personal belonging.

The conceptual framework informed the design of the data collection and analysis, ensuring that structural, relational, and individual dimensions of belonging were explored across multiple methods.
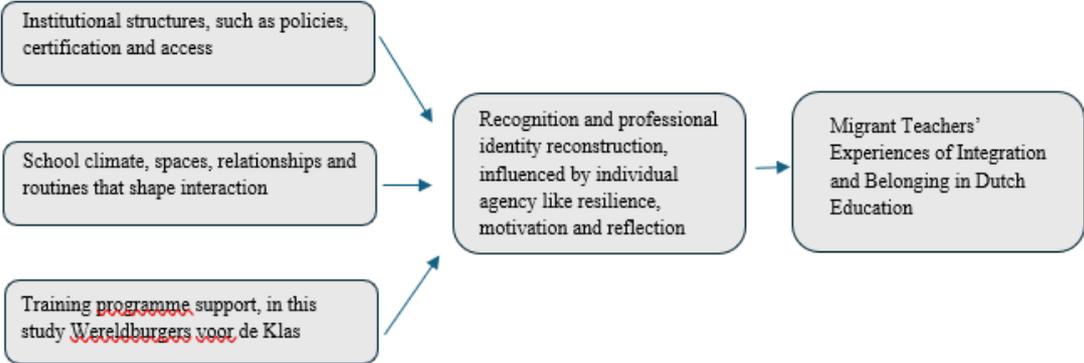

Figure 2: *Conceptual framework: actors influencing migrant teachers' experience of integration and belonging in Dutch education*

3. Methodological design

The experiences of migrant teachers are at the heart of this research. To understand what belonging and integration mean in practice, it is necessary to look beyond policies and focus on the people who live these processes every day. Too often, their voices are interpreted or retold by others. In this chapter, I explain how I tried to approach this differently. I chose a mixed-methods design that combines the breadth of survey data with the depth of interviews and observations. This way, I could explore both general patterns and personal stories. My aim was to write with migrant teachers rather than about them, recognising their experiences as an important source of knowledge.

In the previous chapter, I argued that integration and belonging are not linear or self-contained processes, but relational and multifaceted dynamics that unfold across and between different levels, from policy to classroom practice. To understand how these dynamics take shape in reality, it is important to centre lived experiences of migrant teachers themselves. Yan, Bright, and Prosser (2024) note that migrant teachers are rarely given the opportunity to articulate their own experiences and knowledge within academic settings. Researchers often retell their stories through theoretical frameworks, thereby stripping participants of agency and epistemic authority. In response, these authors advocate for a counter-narrative methodology: a research approach that allows migrant teachers to become the authors of their own narratives ('author(w)riting') and that recognizes subjective, emotional, and experiential knowledge as valid academic material. Yan et al. (2024) emphasize how exceptional it still is for migrant teachers to express their experiences on their own terms:

> It's rare to read any published work where an immigrant teacher is empowered to tell their story on their own terms. (p.28)

Through this critique, Yan, Bright, and Prosser call for a reimagining of research practice, namely one that writes with rather than about migrants, and that acknowledges personal narratives as legitimate forms of knowledge capable of enriching the academic space.

For this reason, I placed the experiences of migrant teachers at the heart of my study and designed an approach that both foregrounds their voices and examines the broader structures shaping their experiences. To achieve this, I adopted a mixed-methods design, which combines the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative inquiry. Specifically, this research follows an explanatory sequential design, in which quantitative data are first collected to identify general trends, followed by qualitative data to explore participants' experiences and the institutional context in greater depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the first phase, I distributed a survey to collect general background information (Parampreet, Stoltzfus, & Yellapu, 2018). The questionnaire consisted of four sections covering personal and demographic background, professional background and training trajectory,

experiences of belonging within Dutch schools, and programme evaluation and future outlook. These sections are explained in further detail below. In the second phase, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven migrant teachers to explore in greater depth how they navigate processes of professional integration and belonging within Dutch schools. The interview sample was strategically selected from survey respondents who had indicated willingness to participate in a follow-up conversation, ensuring variation in gender, teaching level, country of origin, and time since arrival. The survey questionnaire and interview guide are included in Appendix A and B, respectively. Themes for the interviews were derived from the survey results, such as recognition of prior qualifications, language expectations, and workplace support (see chapter 4 for details). Additionally, observations and informal conversations were used to further contextualize the findings.

Throughout the interview process, ethical considerations such as confidentiality and informed consent were handled with care to ensure a safe environment for open dialogue (Ruppenthal et al., 2005). A narrative approach was employed, allowing migrant teachers to reflect on their personal experiences (Elbaz-Luwish, 2007). Because a researcher's position can shape the depth and direction of participants' stories, I maintained an open and balanced stance during interviews, listening attentively without excessive guidance, and critically reflecting on personal assumptions throughout the analysis (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis. This method involves six stages: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing them, defining them, and finally, reporting the findings. Thematic analysis offers a flexible yet systematic way to identify patterns within qualitative data, combining both inductive and deductive approaches. As such, it aligns closely with the aim of this study: to explore how migrant teachers experience, interpret, and assign meaning to their professional journeys.

3.1 Methods

This section outlines the methodological design of the study. It describes the overall research approach, data collection strategies, and analytical procedures used to explore the integration, inclusion, and belonging of migrant teachers participating in the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme. The study followed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative components. This combination allowed for both a broad mapping of patterns through survey data and a deeper understanding of individual experiences through follow-up interviews. The section below explains how these methods were designed, implemented, and integrated to answer the research questions.

3.1.1 Case study

The Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme was chosen as a case study because it offers a concrete and context-rich setting in which to explore how migrant teachers experience integration and belonging in Dutch education. Yin (2018) defines a case study as an in-depth inquiry into a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are blurred. This makes the approach especially suitable for examining complex social processes that cannot be separated from the environments in which they unfold. The Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme provides such a setting. Studying this single, clearly bounded case allows for a rich understanding of how broader institutional and social structures are experienced and shaped by individuals in practice. In line with Yin's (2018) framework, this approach makes it possible to capture the depth and complexity of lived experiences while remaining attentive to the contextual factors that give them meaning.

3.1.2 Survey

As mentioned before, the first phase of data collection involved an online survey. McLafferty and Winata (2023) describe that surveys are a common method for systematically gathering information about a population's or research group's characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes through a structured questionnaire. This approach was particularly suitable because no existing secondary data were available on migrant teachers participating in the Wereldburgers voor de Klas program. Therefore, I began my research by designing and administering a survey to collect original data. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of participants' backgrounds and motivations, their positions within the transition process, and their experiences related to integration, inclusion, and belonging.

The survey was distributed digitally between April and June 2025, to 245 migrant teachers who were current or former participants of the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme. Distribution took place in collaboration with the programme coordinators and through making a mailing list of all alumni and current participants. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. In total, 132 valid responses were collected, resulting in a response rate of 54 percent. The questionnaire mainly consisted of closed-ended and likert-scale questions, complemented by a few open-ended items inviting short reflections and recommendations. In designing and administering the survey, I followed general principles of survey research as described by McLafferty and Winata (2023). This involved defining clear research objectives, formulating accessible and relevant questions, choosing an appropriate mode of administration, and selecting a suitable group of participants. These considerations guided the structure and implementation of my data collection. The final survey was organized around four main thematic clusters:

1. Personal and demographic background: Questions (Q1–Q9) collected information about participants' age, gender, country of origin, years of residence in the Netherlands, language proficiency, housing, and financial situation.

2. Professional background and transition trajectory: Questions (Q10–Q21) focused on teachers' previous professional experiences in their country of origin, including subject taught, years of teaching experience, and highest qualifications obtained. The questions also examined their current stage in the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme, whether their diplomas were recognised, and whether they had completed internships or gained classroom experience in Dutch schools. These questions made it possible to assess both the continuity and disruptions in teachers' career paths.

3. Belonging the Dutch education system: A large part of the survey questions (Q22–Q45) explored participants' current work situations, perceptions of the school environment, and relationships with colleagues. Likert-scale items measured the degree of inclusion, recognition, and belonging in schools. For example, whether teachers felt treated equally, respected for their cultural background, trusted by colleagues, free to teach in their own way, or confident in their professional abilities. This section also included statements about communication, collaboration, participation in school life, and access to professional growth opportunities.

4. Programme evaluation and future outlook: The final section (Q46–Q52) assessed participants' experiences with the training programme itself. Teachers rated the usefulness of different components (such as mentorship, internship, and Dutch language support) and provided feedback on what aspects could be improved.

The collected data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, which allowed for the calculation of frequencies, percentages, and simple cross-tabulations. Because the aim of the survey was exploratory rather than statistical, I did not use advanced statistical software such as SPSS. The intention was not to perform complex analysis but rather to gain an overview of the cohort and to identify tendencies that could inform the qualitative stage of the research. Open-ended responses were read manually and grouped thematically to identify recurring issues, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

At the end of the questionnaire, I asked participants whether they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview. The findings from the survey helped me shape the interview guide, making sure the interviews explored the main themes and issues that came up in the survey.

3.1.3 Semi-structured interviews

After the survey, forty-eight respondents volunteered to be interviewed. Eleven migrant teachers were selected for follow-up semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach. The aim was to include variation in gender, subject specialisation, geographic location, and country of origin, in order to capture a broad range of experiences among migrant teachers. Practical factors, such as participants' willingness and opportunity to take part, were also considered. This approach ensured that the final sample reflected diversity within the limits of the study's scope and timeframe. The interviewees mostly worked in secondary education, and one taught in practical education. None were employed in primary education at the time of the study. This reflects the structure of the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme, which mainly prepares teachers for secondary rather than primary schools. Working in primary education generally requires a higher level of Dutch language proficiency and broader subject knowledge, as primary teachers must teach across multiple subjects. For many migrant teachers, this makes entering primary education more challenging than secondary education. The sample showed considerable diversity. In terms of subject specialisation, participants taught mathematics, physics, chemistry, English, and practical subjects. Notably, the majority of interviewees were teachers of exact or STEM subjects rather than social sciences or humanities such as geography or history. This disciplinary composition may shape their engagement with teaching materials and pedagogical practices, as exact subjects tend to involve less culturally or empirically contextualised content than subjects rooted in local knowledge or social interpretation. Geographic spread was also taken into account to obtain a broad overview, with participants living across the Netherlands, from Friesland and Limburg to South Holland and North Brabant. Three of the eleven interviewees were men, and the rest were women. Lastly, most interviewees (seven out of eleven) were from Turkey, which reflects the overall composition of the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme, where a large proportion of participants have a Turkish background. The remaining interviewees came from Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine, representing other key migrant groups.

The first part focused on participants' background information, teaching experience in their country of origin, reasons for joining the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme, and expectations regarding their participation. The second part addressed their experiences with labour market integration, including the knowledge and skills gained during the programme, perceived preparedness for teaching in the Netherlands, and the support they received. The third theme explored diversity and inclusion in the workplace, focusing on how participants' cultural backgrounds were recognised and valued, and the challenges they faced as migrant teachers. The fourth theme examined teacher belonging, addressing their relationships with colleagues, collaboration within school teams, and their sense of connection and comfort in the school environment. The semi-structured format allowed for both consistency across interviews and flexibility to follow each participant's own story. In designing and conducting the

interviews, I followed the methodological principles of Longhurst and Johnston (2023), who highlight the value of open but guided conversations to explore participants' experiences in depth.

Interview	Education field	Subject	Country of origin	Gender	Place of residence
1	Secondary education	Mathematics	Turkey	Female	The Hague
2	Secondary education	Chemistry / Mathematics	Turkey	Female	Rotterdam
3	Secondary education	Physics	Turkey	Female	Rotterdam
4	Secondary education	English	Syria	Female	Eindhoven
5	Secondary education	Mathematics	Syria	Female	Oss
6	Secondary education	Physics	Iraq	Male	Venray
7	Secondary education	Chemistry	Turkey	Male	Wolvega
8	Secondary education	Chemistry	Turkey	Female	The Hague
9	Secondary education	English	Ukraine	Female	The Hague
10	Secondary education	Physics	Turkey	Male	Amsterdam

Table 4: *Interview migrant teacher participants' profile summary*

3.1.4 Participatory observations and informal conversations

In addition to conducting interviews, I also engaged in participatory observation, following the approach described by McMorran and Green (2024). They define participatory observation as visiting a social setting to study people and their surroundings, with fieldnotes that are both descriptive and analytical in order to uncover patterns, processes, and power dynamics within social relations. Although I did not visit schools to observe migrant teachers in their everyday teaching practice, I did take part in various activities within the Wereldburgers voor de Klas program. This included attending language classes, coaching sessions, webinars, and project days where participants discussed their work placements and the challenges they encountered. Being present during these activities allowed me to gain an insider's view of how migrant teachers navigate the education field. It taught me more about how they collaborate, learn, and deal with obstacles in practice (McMorran and Green, 2024).

During the interviews, as well as in more informal conversations, I tried to create space for participants to share not only their experiences but also the emotions connected to them. To encourage emotional reflection, I allowed pauses and moments of silence to unfold, signalling that such emotions were welcome rather than disruptive. I asked follow-up questions such as 'what did that do to you?' or 'how did that feel for you in that moment?', and acknowledged visible emotional responses when they appeared. When participants expressed feelings non-verbally, I noted these in my research journal immediately after the conversation. These practices helped capture how emotions were not only spoken but also embodied within the interview setting. This approach follows Anderson's (2024) argument that emotions and affect are central to how people relate to and make sense of the world, rather than being peripheral or secondary. Recognizing that feelings shape how individuals experience place, belonging, and social life, I treated participants' emotional responses as valuable forms of insight. By inviting them to reflect on how certain events or situations made them feel, I aimed to acknowledge that, as Anderson (2024) suggests, affect and emotion are key to understanding lived geographies and how people are touched by and respond to broader social processes.

3.1.5 Visual portraits and personal narratives

At one stage of my research, I found myself struggling with how to make my work more visual and personal. I wanted readers not only to understand the analysis but also to see and feel who the participants were. This led me to include portraits throughout the research process as a way to bring the stories of the migrant teachers to life and make the thesis more engaging and human. The idea was partly inspired by a book I discovered during a study trip to Cyprus, Women's Stories from Cyprus and Beyond. Published by the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research, the book presents the real-life stories of remarkable women from Cyprus and abroad. Their stories are used as an educational resource for young learners, offering role models who show strength, resilience, and leadership (AHDR, 2023). Reading these stories inspired me to create a similar space in my research for the migrant teachers, allowing their personal experiences and voices to be recognised and celebrated.

3.2 Data analysis

To analyse the interview data, I selected ATLAS.ti as my qualitative data analysis software. As Gupta (2024) explains, ATLAS.ti helps researchers organise, code, and explore large amounts of text in a systematic and transparent way. It supports different types of coding and offers tools to find connections and themes in the data. It allowed me to move from many pages of text to clear and meaningful patterns, though at times navigating its numerous functions required as much analysis as the data itself.

In my research, I followed the steps suggested by Gupta (2024) for discovering themes in ATLAS.ti. Before starting the coding process, I read each interview transcript several times to become familiar with the content. After this initial familiarisation, I created a new project in ATLAS.ti and began the formal analysis. I read each transcript and used open and in vivo coding to highlight ideas, patterns and phrases drawn directly from the participants' own words. While coding, I wrote short analytical notes to record reflections and observations, and I began grouping similar codes into broader categories to prepare for deeper interpretation. Once the initial coding was complete, I combined and compared codes, exploring where certain topics appeared together or within specific participant groups. I then examined the relationships between codes, which helped me see how often two codes appeared in the same sections of text and assess the strength of their connection through the c-coefficient (Gupta, 2024). Finally, I made an overview of the main patterns and connections in Excel, which helped me see the emerging themes more clearly and compare them against the results from ATLAS.ti. In this table, I organised the raw codes, subthemes, and final themes side by side. This step helped me see how individual participant statements were linked to broader categories. Creating this overview also made it easier to refine and name the final themes, as I could trace each one back to specific codes and quotations. This helped keep the process transparent and showed how the findings were developed.

3.3 Limitations

Although I believe I have collected a substantial and meaningful amount of data, several limitations of this research should be acknowledged. As my research internship took place at Wereldburgers voor de Klas, I was able to reach a relatively large group of migrant teachers through this programme. However, this also meant that teachers outside the initiative were not included. Given that the study partly focuses on the training programme itself, this limitation is not overly problematic, though it remains important to acknowledge. In addition, participation in both the survey and the interviews was voluntary. This may have led to a self-selection effect, where those who held particularly strong opinions, whether positive or negative, were more inclined to share their experiences. Meanwhile, others who felt more neutral or simply satisfied might have been less motivated to take part.

Another important limitation concerns language. While all participants had some proficiency in Dutch, there is always a risk that certain nuances or meanings were lost in translation. In retrospect, I could have offered participants the option to respond in their native language in writing afterwards, giving them more space to fully express themselves. Another aspect to consider is the composition of the sample. Out of the 48 individuals who initially expressed interest in an interview, I ultimately interviewed 11 participants. The selection process, as described in the methodology section, was based on the aim of creating a diverse group. However, this aim was only partially achieved. The level of diversity within the sample was limited, and the findings cannot be generalised to all migrant teachers. Despite this, the study's main objective was to gain an initial understanding of the experiences of these migrant teachers, and in this regard, the collected data provides valuable insight. Finally, I did not conduct classroom observations of the migrant teachers. While such observations could have provided valuable insights into classroom dynamics and teaching practices, they were less directly relevant to the main sub-questions of this study, which focused primarily on teachers' experiences of professional integration and belonging rather than on their instructional methods. Moreover, conducting meaningful and rigorous classroom observations would have required additional time and preparation beyond the scope of this research.

3.4 Reflections

To ensure that every participant felt safe to share their story, I made all contributions in this research anonymous. For that reason, no real names appear anywhere in this thesis, and I chose to create sketches rather than portraits so that individuals would not be directly recognizable. Throughout the research process, I kept participants informed and discussed each step with them.

Another layer of this process involved reflecting on my own position and the perspectives I bring into the study. The position of a researcher is never neutral. Knowledge always emerges within specific social, cultural and personal contexts. Haraway (1988) refers to this as 'situated knowledges': knowledge is inseparable from the person who produces it, from their background, body and experiences. Recognizing this, she argues, is not a weakness but a way of taking responsibility for what one writes and claims. In a similar way, Rich (1984) speaks of the 'politics of location,' emphasizing the importance of understanding from where one speaks. That position influences not only what one is able to see, but also what remains outside the frame. From this perspective, I view my own position as a 23-year-old white, Dutch, female researcher as anything but neutral. I have never had to flee my home or rebuild my life in another country. I was raised with the belief that one should help others and that migrants are an integral part of Dutch society, people who deserve recognition and a new place to belong. I also see

integration as a reciprocal process. All these elements shape how I conduct research, what I notice and what I consider important.

In addition, Rose (1993) reminds us that researchers can never fully observe from the outside. My own perspective is also formed within white, academic structures where certain forms of knowledge are taken for granted while others remain less visible. Ahmed (2012) describes how whiteness often functions as an invisible norm, a background against which everything that seems different stands out. Precisely because that background is rarely named, it often determines what is seen as objective or universal. In my research, I try to make such assumptions visible and to question continuously how my position shapes the knowledge I produce. Abu-Lughod (1991) warns of the danger of speaking about 'the Other' as if referring to a single, homogeneous group. Her call to 'write against culture' reminds me that my role is not to speak for migrants but to create space for multiple voices and experiences. Throughout this process, I have sought to remain conscious of my own perspective and its limits. My position within the organisation also played a role. During this research I interned at, and later worked for, Wereldburgers voor de Klas. As a result, some participants may have seen me more as an employee than as an independent researcher. This may have influenced how they spoke to me or which topics they felt comfortable addressing. At the same time, I made my role explicit in every conversation and emphasised that participation was voluntary and separate from my professional duties.

In line with the insights of Haraway (1988) and Abu-Lughod (1991), I am aware that my position and language choices shape the knowledge I produce. Language is never neutral as it determines who feels heard and which meanings become visible. In retrospect, one thing I would approach differently is allowing participants to communicate in their own language or to supplement their responses afterwards in their mother tongue. I realised that certain nuances may have been lost in translation, which sometimes required me to interpret through my own cultural lens. Although I shared my thesis with participants for feedback and incorporated their comments, I still see room for improvement. In future work I intend to pay more attention to multilingual communication and translation as integral parts of knowledge production, so that participants' voices can be represented more fully without being filtered through my own language and background. I have also learned the value of taking more time for the research process itself. By allowing space for reflection, new insights and connections emerged that deepened my understanding. At the same time, I also learned to trust my own decisions as a researcher. Finally, I hope this thesis contributes to narrowing the gap between migrant teachers and the Dutch educational system. There is still much to be done in this field, and I do not see this project as an endpoint but as a first step towards further dialogue and development.

I'm originally from Azerbaijan and have been living in the Netherlands for almost nine years now. My husband is Dutch, but of Azerbaijani descent, and after our marriage I moved here. In Azerbaijan, I studied chemistry and biology at university. Shortly after graduating, I came to the Netherlands, so I didn't get the chance to work as a teacher there.

At first, I worked in other fields, but my dream was always to work in education, in my own area of expertise. That's why I had my diploma evaluated, and fortunately, it was fully recognized right away, without needing to take any extra courses or subjects. Still, it was quite difficult to find a job, especially because I didn't yet have teaching experience in the Netherlands. Through the programme Wereldburgers voor de klas, I had the opportunity to improve my Dutch, learn more about the Dutch education system, and receive guidance in finding a job. Eventually, I started working as a teaching assistant in chemistry and biology. In Azerbaijan, we don't have this kind of position. There, teachers handle everything themselves, including the lab work. So I found it fascinating to see how teachers and assistants collaborate here in the laboratories.

What stands out to me most are the differences between Azerbaijani and Dutch education. In Azerbaijan, the system is more traditional: students have to memorize a lot and give oral explanations. In the Netherlands, the focus is more on independence, collaboration, and discovering what each student finds interesting. Students here also have more freedom in choosing their subjects, which I find very valuable. Working in Dutch education gives me a lot of satisfaction. I keep learning every day, from my colleagues and from my students. It's a wonderful feeling to be part of their learning journey and to watch them grow. That's exactly why I love teaching.

4. Experiences of migrant teachers in Dutch education

> Colleagues were friendly, but I could feel they were not sure what to expect from me. Sometimes it felt like I had to prove twice that I was a teacher. Teaching is not just my job, it is who I am, and being able to do it again here in the Netherlands would mean the world to me.[1]

This chapter brings together the key findings from the empirical research conducted for this study. The findings are presented as a journey through the experiences of migrant teachers in Dutch education. The first part examines the structural barriers and entry conditions shaping their return to the profession. Recognition of foreign diplomas, contract types, and language proficiency determine whether teachers can take their first steps back into education. The focus then shifts to the social dimensions of schools, where task divisions, collegial interaction and representation reveal how inclusion and exclusion are enacted in practice. Here, migrant teachers encounter both subtle and explicit boundaries, as well as crucial moments of recognition and support. The third chapter turns to the personal and pedagogical level, exploring how teachers rebuild a professional identity, manage motivation and emotion, and make the classroom a space where everything converges: authority, language, practice, and relationships with students. Finally, I discuss Wereldburgers voor de Klas, a programme all participants followed that provides a temporary but vital space of orientation and support. It functions as a bridge between structural barriers, social dynamics, and personal struggles, while also revealing the limits of such initiatives in addressing deeper inequalities. Through this layered approach, I show how migrant teachers' journeys move across institutions, colleagues, emotions, and classrooms, with the shared hope of being recognized once more as full and active educators.

4.1 Access to teaching in the Netherlands

For migrant teachers, the path back into Dutch classrooms is shaped by formal rules and procedures that they experience as both constraining and defining. Diplomas must first be recognised, initial contracts are often short and insecure, and language proficiency is treated as a decisive test. These conditions determine not only whether teachers can return to the profession, but also in what role and on what terms.

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[1] Informal conversation with a migrant teacher during a field visit in Groningen, September 2025.

4.1.1 Recognition and validation of professional capital

For migrant teachers, the recognition of foreign qualifications is the formal entry point into the Dutch education labour market. The process usually begins at Nuffic, the national organisation that evaluates foreign diplomas, and continues at DUO, the government agency responsible for implementing education law and granting official recognition. Almost all respondents described this trajectory as complex, time-consuming and far from transparent. Many migrant teachers were unsure which additional documents are needed, or which forms of evidence will be accepted. This created long periods of uncertainty: some waited for months without knowing if their studies and work experience will be recognized.

> I started the validation of my diploma very early. First you have to send it to IDW, so they can decide what your diploma is worth in the Netherlands. Only after that do you know what to do next. If my diploma is not exactly the same, I might have to study for one, two, or even three more years. In my case it took six months at IDW and then another two or three months at DUO before I finally received my qualification.[2]

For those migrants who had to flee suddenly, these obstacles were often even greater. Diplomas and transcripts may have been lost or left behind. In other cases, studies were interrupted by war or conflict. As a result, years of study and work experience often went unrecognized. Without official documents, recognition is nearly impossible, forcing some migrant teachers to begin a new teacher training programme in the Netherlands.

However, even when diplomas are available, foreign qualifications are not automatically recognised as equivalent in the Netherlands. Given the diversity of teacher education systems worldwide, it is understandable that Dutch authorities seek to ensure comparability and uphold educational standards. Yet, this raises the question: whose standards are being upheld, and who decides what counts as equivalent? From an institutional perspective, procedures such as diploma recognition and language testing are framed as neutral safeguards designed to maintain the quality and reliability of teaching. However, these safeguards operate within a national framework that privileges particular forms of knowledge, training, and linguistic competence, typically those produced within the Dutch system itself. For many migrant teachers, these mechanisms produce deep uncertainty and a sense of structural devaluation. Long careers and accumulated expertise were insufficiently acknowledged, leaving them with the burden of having to prove themselves within a system that assigns lesser value to their prior knowledge and achievements. What appears as a reasonable institutional measure to ensure quality thus

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[2] Interview 6

simultaneously functions as a boundary that determines whose professionalism counts and on what terms.

4.1.2 Entry through internships or assistant roles

Even after recognition, recruitment itself is rarely a neutral process. Several migrant teachers describe how they are rejected again and again, often without any explanation. At times they feel that their CVs are mainly weighed against those of Dutch candidates, as if they must first provide extra proof before being taken seriously. This does not always stem from bad intentions: schools often simply do not know the exact value of a foreign diploma, or they doubt whether a new colleague will be immediately deployable. But precisely this shows that recruitment processes are far from neutral. They are shaped by assumptions about what makes a 'good teacher.' Assumptions that leave little space for the qualities and potential that migrant teachers bring. One migrant teacher explained to me how, during a job interview at a school in the north of the Netherlands, she was asked unusual and highly personal questions. Instead of asking mainly about her teaching, the director asked her views on issues such as female circumcision, gender roles, and 'Dutch norms and values', to be sure they were 'on the same page.' She was from Turkey, described herself as modern, and said she was against female circumcision and in favour of equality between men and women. But she also explained how strange and uncomfortable it felt to be confronted with these kinds of questions. It made her feel she was being tested less on her qualities as a teacher and more on whether she fit an idea of cultural conformity.

When diplomas are (partly) recognized, entry almost always begins with an internship or a temporary position as a teaching assistant. These positions have a double character. On the one hand, they offer a valuable transition period in which migrant teachers can become familiar with Dutch school culture, practise the language in real situations, and reshape their subject teaching. Many participants emphasised that these first experiences increased their self-confidence and that it is reasonable that schools do not appoint them straight away as full teachers (something they themselves often did not yet want either). In this sense, the assistantship is sometimes seen as a necessary and understandable intermediate step. On the other hand, the contracts are almost always temporary and insecure, with low pay and limited prospects for advancement. For many migrant teachers this felt like a structural downgrading of their expertise. Their previous teaching experience counted for little, meaning they effectively started again at the bottom of the ladder. In addition, many migrant teachers were reluctant to criticise pay or working conditions, out of gratitude for having found a place in education at all. This 'culture of gratitude' made it difficult to raise issues of inequality and contributed to the normalisation of structural differences in employment conditions.

I did an internship for one year, and I have twelve years of experience in Turkey as a chemistry teacher. In total I have fourteen years of experience. But those years do not count here. My colleagues receive contracts based on their experience, while I am recognised for only one year. That is not equal. I feel happy and grateful, but I know this is not fair.[3]

When contracts are not renewed, teachers also faced considerable financial pressure. Several participants explained that they were forced to accept work outside the education sector, for example in retail or hospitality, to support themselves. The mismatch between skills and available positions became very clear here: experienced teachers ended up in supporting roles simply because their Dutch is not considered sufficient or their foreign experience is not acknowledged.

Within this pattern there were also subject-related differences. STEM teachers (mathematics, natural sciences) reported more opportunities to gain experience through assistantships and to move up into full teaching positions. In contrast, for the social sciences or language subjects, assistantships are almost absent. In those cases, the temporary contract often ended after a year, when the teacher is still not regarded as fully qualified. For this group the assistant positions turned out to be more symbolic entry routes that rarely led to sustainable careers. The result is a paradoxical starting point: assistant roles are, on the one hand, an important stepping stone and learning environment, but on the other hand risk becoming an institutional dead end where migrant teachers remain working below their level of qualification for extended periods.

4.1.3 Language as barrier and bridge

Alongside diplomas and contracts, language is repeatedly mentioned as a structural condition. Without sufficient proficiency, formal recognition is difficult to put to use and the step towards a permanent position remains almost out of reach. Many respondents felt that their subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise initially weighed less than their language level. They were judged on their accent or vocabulary first, and only afterwards on their teaching qualities. One migrant teacher who applied for a job as an English teacher explained that schools almost always chose a candidate with Dutch as their mother tongue. From the school's perspective this is understandable – a teacher must be able to give instructions, feedback, and classroom management in correct Dutch – but for those involved it confirmed that language often carried more weight than subject expertise.

Migrant teachers themselves recognise this tension: language is not only a barrier but also a necessary condition for quality and equal treatment. It is at once a practical tool and a symbolic measure of

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[3] Interview 7

professionalism. Even those who reach fluency may still be marked by their accent, which signals 'non-nativeness' and continues to affect how their competence is perceived. At the same time, teachers emphasise that progress in Dutch brings confidence, legitimacy, and the possibility to fully participate in school life. Yet communication extends beyond vocabulary or grammar. Teachers note that understanding the cultural dimensions of language, such as the Dutch preference for directness or the use of irony in everyday interaction, is equally important for being seen as a 'good fit' within school culture. I elaborate on this later when discussing the social dimensions of school life. Language thus functions both as a bridge and a barrier: it opens doors, but it also reinforces unequal distinctions that devalue prior professional experience.

Beyond these formal structures of recognition and employment, several initiatives have emerged to support migrant teachers in entering the profession more effectively.

I come from Syria and I was born in Damascus, the capital of Syria, where I studied mathematics at the Faculty of Science at the University of Damascus.

After my studies, I taught for ten years in primary and secondary schools. During those years, I learned a lot, especially that a teacher sometimes has to be a mother or a father first before they can truly teach. I always loved my subject, but through teaching my love for education grew even more. Many students find mathematics difficult, but I managed to present it in a simple, fun, and understandable way. My lessons were always full of energy, cooperation, and joy. Because of the war in Syria, my husband had to leave the country. After waiting for two years, I decided to come to the Netherlands with my children. We deliberately chose the Netherlands because my husband told me that the Dutch are known for their kindness, simplicity, and openness. And he was right, because I quickly felt at home here.

I wanted to continue my career, so I started learning Dutch and enrolled at the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme in Tilburg. That was a wonderful experience. I not only learned the language, but also how the Dutch education system works. The teachers were friendly and very knowledgeable, and my fellow students were always ready to help. During my studies, I did an internship at a secondary school in Breda as a teaching assistant, and later as a supporting mathematics teacher at a school in Tilburg. That second experience was especially valuable: I could fully focus on helping students with mathematics. Together with the teachers, I supported classes and gave tutoring to small groups of students to help them understand the material and solve exercises. There are many differences between the school systems in Syria and the Netherlands. For example, in Syria, when mathematics teachers give homework, they write the answers on a whiteboard, because only the very expensive schools in Syria have digital boards. There are no laptops for secondary school students, only in higher education do you finally get one.

Now I am looking for a new job at a school in the Netherlands. Even with the teacher shortage in the Netherlands, I find it difficult to find a job. It would be better if schools supported and employed teachers from abroad, so that the teacher shortage could be solved. There are many students who do not have teachers, this would help both the students and the teachers who are looking for a job. I hope to continue my teaching career here, because I love my profession, and there is nothing more beautiful to me than helping students find confidence and success in mathematics.

4.2 Social dimensions in school

The previous part examined the formal conditions for entering the profession. This part moves to the next stage: finding a position and navigating daily life within a school. Recruitment and job applications play an important role in this process. Equally significant, however, are the experiences that unfold once teachers have entered the school, in their everyday work and interactions.

4.2.1 Tasks and everyday practice

Once inside the school, many migrant teachers described how unequal treatment seemed to persist in more subtle forms, particularly in the distribution of tasks and learning opportunities. Several migrant teachers reported that heavier tasks or leadership responsibilities tended to go more quickly to Dutch colleagues. From the perspective of school management, this division of responsibilities could also be presented as a way of keeping the workload manageable for newcomer teachers as they adapt to a new system and language. Yet, for many migrant teachers, such arrangements reinforced the feeling that their prior expertise was overlooked. Contract terms were likewise often more favourable for less experienced Dutch teachers than for migrants with many years of experience, as already discussed here above.

In addition, there were differences in access to resources and relational recognition. Dutch interns and teaching assistants were sometimes given login codes for digital learning platforms or student monitoring systems, while migrant teachers in similar roles were not. The reasons for this were not always made explicit. For those involved, these differences confirmed that their role was seen as less central. These practices may not always be intentional, but they show that inequality is not only about formal criteria. Instead, it is also about everyday positioning: how migrant teachers are valued, trusted, and included by colleagues and school leaders.

> At my school there is another teaching assistant, born in the Netherlands. She has all the codes and can do administrative work. I am also a teaching assistant, but I am not allowed. That feels unfair. I also need to learn.[4]

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[4] Interview 11

4.2.2 Social positioning

The positioning of migrant teachers is not only reflected in tasks, but also in subtler interactions. Some participants mentioned that colleagues turned their backs, avoided eye contact, or continued conversations without them. For the migrant teachers involved, this confirmed their peripheral position, even when such behaviour was likely not intentional but rather due to heavy workloads or a lack of attention to inclusion in daily routines. Another factor is that the topics discussed in staff rooms are not always easily accessible for new colleagues. Migrant teachers said they often did not know how to join in, or their contributions were not taken as fitting the existing conversational culture. As a result, their presence was sometimes reduced to listening, even though they were looking for ways to participate and have their professional voice heard. At the same time, they stressed that informal moments in these same spaces, coffee breaks, shared meals, or small talk with colleagues, were crucial for building trust and a sense of belonging.

Another teacher highlighted cultural differences in everyday conversations, noting that in the Netherlands colleagues often talk about 'pets or holidays' during breaks, topics not common in his own culture. As a result, he said, he often stayed quiet, which made him 'feel a bit apart.' He stressed that colleagues were not unkind, but the difference sometimes felt like 'living with two cultures: one at home and another at school.' On top of this, migrant teachers face particular difficulty when colleagues use figurative expressions and proverbs in the quick exchanges of the staff room. Conversations often move fast and informally, and jokes or ironic remarks are not always immediately recognizable.

Adjusting to a new professional environment also mean learning to navigate different organizational hierarchies. While Dutch schools are characterized by relatively flat structures where teachers are expected to voice their opinions, this was not self-evident for those from more top-down systems. One respondent admitted that she was still learning to adjust to the very different sense of hierarchy in Dutch schools. In her country of origin, the structure was highly vertical: teachers were expected to listen to the director and follow instructions without discussion. By contrast, she discovered that Dutch schools operate in a much flatter way. Team leaders and even principals were approachable, and staff were encouraged to raise questions or express their own views. While she appreciated the openness, she emphasized that this did not yet come naturally to her, since it contrasted so strongly with the culture of deference to authority in which she had been trained as a teacher.

A few respondents also reported facing explicitly discriminatory remarks from colleagues. One woman was asked when she would 'go back to her own country,' or received comments about her accent and supposed lack of language skills. She explained that such statements not only undermined her position as a professional, but also triggered old traumas connected to her forced migration history. What may have been meant by colleagues as casual jokes or innocent questions worked for her as painful reminders

of loss and uprooting. While such direct experiences of discrimination were not widespread in the interview findings, they show how everyday exclusion can sometimes take harsher, more confrontational forms. Precisely because these remarks often occurred during informal moments in the staff room or schoolyard, they reinforced a sense of not being fully welcome in the team. Combined with subtler experiences of being overlooked or left out, these experiences illustrate how inequality and exclusion stretches from missed encounters to direct comments with emotional and psychological weight

4.2.3 Spatial positioning

In addition to tasks and interactions, inequality and exclusion also take a spatial form. The staff room, for instance, reflects this positioning. In theory it should be a place of collegial exchange, but in practice it often does not function as a natural meeting space. Instead, fixed patterns emerge: teachers cluster together, teaching assistants sit with each other, and the lines between groups are rarely crossed.

One participant, working in a large secondary school, described how teaching assistants usually sat separately in the staff room:

> There are maybe 300 teachers in my school, so it is a very big place. As teaching assistants we share a student desk, four or five of us, and that is good, we can eat together or do something fun. In the staff room, though, teachers usually sit on one side and the assistants on the other (…) I find it a bit difficult to join in, because I speak slowly. I make mistakes, and maybe they do not have time to listen.[5]

For migrant teachers, who usually start in an assistant role, this means that the staff room does not provide entry into a wider professional community but rather reinforces existing boundaries. The opportunity for encounter is physically present, yet socially not realised. A prospective migrant mathematics teacher, for example, explained to me that despite his ambition to connect, he hardly had the chance to get to know the mathematics teachers in his school better. His presence in the same space therefore did not automatically translate into building a network and new connections. Subtle hierarchies of role, language, and familiarity often shaped who spoke to whom, and about what. The ways people position themselves and interact determine whether a space functions inclusively or exclusively. The staff room thus becomes not just a place for breaks, but also a social arena where (non-)encounters, distances, and forms of belonging are constantly produced.

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[5] Interview 5

This pattern also appears in how migrant teachers are positioned within classrooms. Several participants shared that mentors often did not know how to make use of their expertise. Instead of an active role, like guiding small groups or taking over parts of lessons, they were regularly placed at the back of the classroom with the instruction mainly to observe. This physical positioning is not neutral: it underscores their secondary status and symbolically marks the boundary between 'the teacher' and 'the assistant.' For some, their presence felt more like a burden than an added value, undermining their sense of professionalism and agency. The lack of clear role assignment, and its spatial reinforcement, means that internships or assistant experiences - intended as learning environments - often result in passive roles. The classroom space, which serves as a place to practice, make mistakes, and grow, becomes for migrant teachers more a place of observation and limitation. Their professional development is therefore restricted not only in content but also spatially.

> I observe, I watch the English teachers from the back of the classroom. Some teachers want to help me and give me a task. I want to be more involved, to do more. But some teachers do not give me the space, they feel responsible themselves, I think. They want to do everything, but I also want to learn. I have said many times that I want this. I am not afraid of making mistakes. I can learn from it. I understand them too, but in this project maybe they could share the tasks little by little, so I can learn.[6]

4.2.4 Recognition, support and inclusive practices

Fortunately, alongside the experiences of exclusion and institutional inequality, migrant teachers also spoke about situations in which they felt recognized and supported. These moments are described as strengthening their confidence and giving them the sense of being taken seriously as professionals. A positive recurring theme is the role of strong collegial relationships. Several respondents emphasized that they felt empowered when colleagues took them seriously, explicitly involved them in lessons or meetings, or showed interest in their perspective. Everyday gestures, like an invitation to guide a group of pupils, a request for advice, or a conversation during a coffee break, had a strong impact. For many, these marked the first time they felt like full professionals again. One respondent described how the trust of a colleague gave her the chance to teach a class on her own, which she herself called a turning point in her trajectory. Other participants also highlighted the importance of mentorship and support from school leaders. Positive experiences were often linked to mentors who created space to value their background and expertise. Such recognition helped teachers rebuild their professional identity in the Dutch context and gave them confidence that their contribution mattered.

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[6] Interview 5

She really showed empathy towards me, she understood me, and I was able to tell her my refugee story. She helped me very much.[7]

The broader school environment could also foster recognition. Some participants explained that working in multicultural teams or in schools where diversity was more common created a sense of safety and encouragement. In those settings they felt freer to make their background visible, for example by sharing experiences from their country of origin or by taking part in interfaith initiatives. These examples show that inclusion can also be embedded institutionally, rather than relying solely on individual colleagues.

Interestingly, some respondents actively sought recognition: they took the initiative by sharing experiences or knowledge, asking for more responsibility, or positioning themselves clearly as teachers rather than assistants. This proactive attitude sometimes helped to shift boundaries, showing that recognition depends not only on school culture but also on the agency and personality of the teacher. Others, however, found this more difficult. Out of insecurity, limited language skills, or fear of being seen as difficult, they chose to wait. In those cases, their position depended more on how colleagues and leaders approached them. Outcomes were therefore never uniform: in some schools, own initiative was rewarded, and space was created for growth. In other schools effrts fell flat or a more passive stance led to further marginalization.

What these varied experiences have in common is that recognition is rarely automatic. Sometimes a small gesture or a chance to take responsibility marks a shift, changing the balance from 'I am allowed to be here' to 'I have something valuable to offer here.' In other cases that shift never occurs, and inequality remains unspoken and untouched.

4.2.5 Representation and visibility

Beyond the daily experiences of recognition and exclusion, the question of representation also plays an important role in how migrant teachers experience their position in education. Several respondents stressed that their visibility as teachers with a migration background brings both opportunities and tensions. Some participants explained that they hardly saw themselves as role models. They noted that pupils rarely approached them in that way, or that the context, for instance, a school in a region with little ethnic diversity, meant their presence was seen more as an exception than as an example. This created a tension: they wanted to be recognized as teachers but remained aware of how their 'difference' was perceived. At the same time, there were also experiences in which migrant teachers were actively asked to share their background, such as in international transition classes, where their multilingualism

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[7] Interview 9

and migration experience were valued. Such moments contributed to a sense of meaning: their presence in the classroom went beyond the role of 'assistant' and gained a broader social value.

Regional contexts made a clear difference. In rural areas, migrant teachers emphasized how strongly the lack of ethnic diversity in education was felt. The absence of colleagues with a similar background reinforced feelings of isolation and limited the possibility of linking their own identity to their professional role. One respondent from a rural area added that his principal openly admitted to finding it 'difficult' to anticipate how parents would react to his appointment. According to her, parents often stressed that they wanted 'simply good education' for their children, which implicitly suggested that his migration background might be a risk to educational quality. Such signals illustrate that the visibility of migrant teachers in rural contexts is not always taken for granted and may be scrutinized more closely.

In urban and multicultural contexts, several teachers described diversity as something more self-evident in everyday life. The presence of multiple colleagues and pupils with diverse backgrounds created familiarity and recognition, which reduced the symbolic weight of being 'the only one.' As one teacher explained: 'Here there is no discrimination, because there are so many people from different cultures. This way I don't feel apart, not even because of my headscarf.' In such settings, representation was less often made explicit and became part of everyday practice. At the same time, this difference was never absolute: there were also rural schools where migrant teachers felt welcome and supported from the start, while in urban schools' resistance or hesitation could still be felt. The decisive factor was ultimately the culture of the school itself, whether diversity and inclusion were actively embraced, or whether difference was silently marked as deviation.

Finally, several respondents described the need to navigate continuously between their professional identity and the ways in which their migration background was perceived by others. This often involved deciding how visible or audible their difference could be in daily interactions with colleagues and students. They wanted above all to be recognised as teachers and peers, yet found that their background implicitly or explicitly influenced how they were seen. This tension illustrates that representation extends beyond mere presence; it depends on whether visibility is met with recognition or with the marking of otherness.

I have been working for almost two years as a teaching assistant at a school in the north of the Netherlands. To give readers an idea of what that experience has been like, I'd like to share a few excerpts from my diary:

Week 1

This week I taught a class at school for the first time. I was very nervous. But when I started explaining, my nerves slowly disappeared. When I think back, I think I gave the lesson with a very loud voice. I don't know if that was because my Dutch is not yet good, or because I was nervous. This week, some students lied to the teacher whose lesson I was following. I noticed that the teacher didn't realize it. Because it's his first year, I thought. Then I saw that actually I have more experience and can quickly understand the behavior of students. In the lesson of another teacher, I helped the children with their assignments. A few children said that I explained things better. That made me very proud and very happy, but it also felt a bit strange. In the teachers' room I still find it difficult to fully understand the conversations :(

Week 2

Because of the test week, I gave many one-on-one lessons to students this week. The moment I see that look in their eyes, "I understand it!", that motivates me the most. Sometimes I think that I can never really be a teacher here. Teaching in another language to children from another culture seems almost impossible. But when I do manage something and get nice reactions in return, I feel completely recharged again. So it was a week in which I felt recharged and motivated. Oh and yes, I also attended my first meeting. I felt comfortable, maybe because of the topic. While I was helping students with physics questions they couldn't solve, I got the feeling that the physics teacher didn't really like that I have such a close bond with the students. I felt a bit of a strange tension. We'll see how it goes next week.

Week 3

Every time I meet the religion teacher in the teachers' room, he asks questions about Islam again. This time he asked: "Why do Muslims pray together on the street, and why is a dog haram?" It actually bothers me to keep talking with him about this. According to him, I'm an expert. He keeps talking about how beautiful Catholicism can be. He doesn't know that he cannot change me. Also, I didn't go to the meeting I was supposed to attend. I found that quite embarrassing. I was at school when the meeting started, and I saw that it was already going on, but I wasn't sure whether I should go or not. The strange thing was, nobody asked why I hadn't come.

4.3 Individual dimension

Migration, and especially forced migration, is always more than a change of residence: leaving behind a familiar world, losing security and status, and having to reinvent yourself in a new context. It is a profound experience that leaves deep traces in both personal and professional life. This chapter focuses on the personal dimension of migrant teachers: the motivations and emotions that drive them, their search for a new professional identity, and the challenges of a new pedagogical practice.

4.3.1 Rebuilding a professional identity

Although many migrant teachers had worked as teachers for years in their countries of origin, they found that in the Netherlands their expertise was not simply transferable. A frequently used metaphor was that they felt like 'students' again: despite their professional background, they had to begin once more at the bottom of the ladder. For some, this was a step they accepted and even embraced. It gave them the chance to observe, to become familiar with Dutch educational culture, and to slowly rebuild their confidence. They spoke of using this period to experiment with new methods, to compare systems, and to reconnect with the essence of why they wanted to teach in the first place. In that sense, starting over was not only about loss, but also about reshaping and expanding their professional identity in a new setting. Others, however, experienced the same process in a far more painful way. Beginning again was not a neutral stage of learning but a sharp reminder of what they had lost: years of authority, expertise, and professional standing that seemed to carry little weight in their new environment. For them, professionalisation in the Netherlands was less about growth and more about a feeling that their previous career was being dismissed rather than recognised. This tension between past expertise and present positioning was summed up by one participant:

> I want to give some advice to all migrant teachers: try to let go of what your professional life was like in your home country. Back there, we may have been experienced teachers, respected, even holding high positions. But here in the Netherlands we have to start over as real beginners. We need to set aside everything from our past careers, except for our subject knowledge and our educational mindset. We begin again, at a lower level. And compared to Dutch colleagues, we often struggle to make our voices heard.[8]

The contrast between these perspectives shows how rebuilding a professional identity can be both empowering and disempowering. For some, the metaphor of being a student again meant discovery and renewal; for others, it signified displacement and decline. In both cases, the journey of becoming a

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[8] Interview 9

teacher again was not a straightforward continuation of their career, but a process of reinvention in which past experience had to be renegotiated within new institutional boundaries.

4.3.2 Pedagogical practice and classroom management

Although classroom management posed one of the greatest challenges for migrant teachers, it also offered a very important learning space. Many described the classroom as the place where their prior experience collided most visibly with the realities of Dutch education. In their countries of origin, authority and hierarchy often formed the backbone of teaching: discipline was expected, and relationships between teachers and pupils were marked by formality. By contrast, Dutch classrooms required a different stance, more dialogue with pupils, more flexibility in responding to their needs, and more room for informal contact. This shift reshaped how teachers understood their role. Authority, once taken for granted, now had to be renegotiated through a new language and new forms of interaction. Language was central in this process. Everyday acts such as giving instructions, setting boundaries, or correcting behaviour demanded precise wording and quick responsiveness. For those still uncertain in Dutch, this could be deeply unsettling. As one teacher recalled, trying to bring a noisy class to order was frustrating: 'I knew what I wanted to say, but not how to express it briefly and firmly.' The challenge was not limited to classroom discipline. Teaching subjects outside their own expertise could be especially demanding. One English teacher described preparing for a citizenship class:

> A few weeks ago, I had to teach citizenship. It took me so much preparation time. I had to talk about freedom and safety, but I first needed to learn the vocabulary, sentences, and then make it interesting for the children. It took me a lot of time.[9]

Perceptions of student behaviour added another layer. Some migrant teachers described Dutch pupils as more direct and outspoken than they were accustomed to. One teacher contrasted her earlier experience of automatic respect with what she encountered in the Netherlands: 'I open my mouth in the first lesson, and a pupil starts laughing. That never happened before. In my previous classrooms, when I entered, everyone wanted to listen.' For her, this behaviour seemed unique to migrant teachers, though Dutch colleagues insisted their students behaved the same way. The tension highlights how cultural expectations strongly shape how teachers interpret student behaviour. Here the link between language and pedagogy becomes clear. Without the right words, authority risks slipping away. Some teachers admitted they hesitated to take initiative for fear their message would not land. Others, however, framed the same struggle as a learning process. Pupils sometimes corrected their pronunciation or word choice.

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[9] Interview 9

While awkward, it also became instructive. As one teacher put it, authority could be rebuilt not only through flawless control, but also through openness to correction and growth.

On the one hand, the classroom could feel like a place of exposure, where every linguistic misstep was amplified. On the other hand, it is also the place where progress was most tangible. Each small improvement in language or classroom management did more than smooth a lesson: it restored confidence, re-established authority, and reinforced the sense of being a teacher again. In this sense, the classroom functioned as more than a setting for pedagogy. It was the very space where different teaching worlds met and collided: the traditions of hierarchy and formality many teachers brought with them, and the expectations of dialogue and informality they encountered in Dutch schools. Within its walls, authority could shift from something assumed to something that had to be earned and redefined. Every lesson became a negotiation, between past and present teaching cultures, between the comfort of established routines and the vulnerability of linguistic uncertainty, between the pressure to maintain control and the chance to experiment with new forms of interaction. Because these negotiations unfold so visibly and so repeatedly, the classroom becomes the place where professional identity itself is reshaped. It is not only where migrant teachers perform their role again, but where they learn how to inhabit it again under new conditions.

4.3.3 Motivations and emotions

What emerges consistently from the interviews is that the wish to return to teaching is not driven only by economic necessity. For many migrant teachers, teaching is more than employment: it is meaningful work, a way to give young people perspective, to use their expertise, and, for some, to practice social justice by contributing to society and inspiring the next generation. Yet beneath these motives lies something more personal and harder to capture: a deep sense of being a teacher. Many described it as an identity that stays with them regardless of crossing borders. Teaching, they explained, is not simply a profession they once practiced, but a way of seeing the world, of relating to children, of carrying themselves in daily life. This sense of belonging to the profession provides motivation even when recognition is lacking and fuels their determination to find their place again in the classroom.

Sometimes, set against this motivation. is a heavy emotional burden. Several participants spoke about stress, burnout, being very tired of all the impressions, and psychological pressure. This is not only fuelled by temporary contracts, high workloads, and the constant need to prove themselves, but also by the uncertainty of never knowing whether their efforts would lead to stable employment. For those with families, this strain was sharpened by financial concerns: the urgency of providing an income often forced them to accept jobs below their level of training or outside education altogether. Some described

the frustration of repeatedly starting over, while also carrying the responsibility of providing stability for their children. This tension between professional aspirations, economic necessity, and the insecurities that come with migration weighed heavily. The intensity of these experiences was not only psychological but also physical. One participant described how, after completing a single day of teaching practice, she needed two hours of sleep simply to recover from the impressions and demands of the classroom. This example illustrates how the pressure of navigating a new school environment, in a new language and with unfamiliar expectations, can be exhausting to the point of overwhelming the body itself. It underscores that the strain of re-entering the profession is not an abstract idea but a lived reality, felt in the most immediate rhythms of daily life.

The wider social climate also left its mark. Several participants spoke with concern about political developments in the Netherlands, the rise of far-right parties, the tone of public debate, and the way migration is often framed as a problem. These discussions were not abstract for them; they touched on their daily lives and their sense of belonging. When public discussions question the legitimacy of migrants or frame diversity as a problem, this also affects how migrant teachers perceive their place in society. Some described a heightened sense of vulnerability, as if they had to prove themselves twice over. Others wondered more quietly whether the education system, and society more broadly, truly had space for what they could bring. Alongside these worries, participants also pointed to budget cuts in education, which they feared would reduce opportunities and make it even harder for newcomers to find a secure position. For them, politics was not a distant background but a reality shaping the ground on which they tried to stand as new teachers.

Earlier migration experiences and traumas could also resurface. As discussed in Chapter 2, one respondent described how comments from colleagues about her accent, or questions about when she would 'go back to her own country,' reopened old wounds. Over time, these daily cuts accumulated. She is currently on the edge of burnout, her temporary contract has not been renewed, and she is now without work, an experience that has left her feeling both exhausted and anxious about the future. Her story illustrates how such remarks are never just words, but can carry heavy consequences when combined with structural insecurity and the pressures of migration. At the same time, some teachers explicitly resist being diminished by these challenges.

At the same time, migrant teachers reveal considerable resilience. Repeatedly, they stress that their motivation outweighs the obstacles they encounter. None of them wants to sit at home, or to take on work far below their level of training. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, what carries them is the feeling that being a teacher does not disappear with migration. They long to be back in the classroom, to work with pupils, to encourage a student who dislikes their subject to see it as fun, or to witness a child's pride at finally understanding a difficult concept. For many, these moments of teaching are not only professional goals but also personal sources of joy and meaning. Just as important, they

wish to be part of a learning environment again. A space where they can pass on knowledge but also continue to learn, grow, and adapt themselves. The wish to remain in education gives them direction and energy, even in the face of uncertainty and the scars of migration. Through teaching, they hope to build a sense of belonging in a new country. In addition, one migrant teacher expressed that she was 'done' with excusing her Dutch. While her language skills may not be flawless, she emphasized that colleagues and pupils understand her perfectly well, and that this should no longer serve as a reason to deny her opportunities. Rather than apologizing for not meeting a native standard, she insists on being judged by the quality of her teaching. Her statement conveys a powerful form of resilience: refusing to internalize deficit views and choosing instead to claim professional space on her own terms. This determination, though often tested, emerges as one of the strongest threads running through their stories.

I come from Ukraine, where I studied English language and literature and began my career teaching English to teenagers and adults. Teaching has always been a passion of mine, not only because I love the language itself but also because I see it as a bridge between people and cultures. Alongside my Master's degree, I earned an international Cambridge teaching certificate, which allowed me to teach English at different levels.

When the war in Ukraine started, I happened to be in the Netherlands on vacation. What was meant to be a short visit suddenly turned into a life-changing decision to stay and rebuild my life here. Choosing to dive into the Dutch education system was both exciting and challenging, as I had to learn a new language, adapt to a different culture, and find my way as a teacher in a new environment.

I was fortunate to be selected for the Wereldburgers voor de klas programme, which became a pivotal year in my journey, not only improving my Dutch significantly but also giving me invaluable insights into teaching in a multicultural context and guiding students toward becoming open-minded, engaged global citizens. Through this programme, I was connected to Sancta Maria Lyceum in Haarlem, first as a teaching assistant and later as an English teacher. The school quickly became a place where I felt at home, warm, supportive, and full of opportunities to grow.

Teaching in the Netherlands has shown me how powerful education can be in shaping empathetic, curious, and globally aware young people. I always encourage my students to use English actively: to speak, write, and explore without fear of making mistakes. It's deeply rewarding to see how learning English helps students express themselves and connect with others.

Looking back, I'm proud of how far I've come. Starting a new teaching career in another country hasn't been easy, but it has been deeply meaningful. I see myself not only as a teacher of language but also as someone who helps young people build curiosity and confidence to engage with the world beyond their classroom walls.

4.4 Casestudy: Wereldburgers voor de Klas

All respondents in this study participated in the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme. It is therefore not just background context but a central element in their trajectories, and thus in my research. The programme offers migrant teachers one of the first formal opportunities to re-engage with teaching practice in the Netherlands. Yet it does not claim to resolve the structural challenges they face. Instead, it provides a form of guidance that is largely absent elsewhere. Precisely because of this, its significance becomes visible: in a context where access to the profession (Chapter 1), inclusion within schools (Chapter 2), and professional identity and motivation (Chapter 3) are constantly under pressure, Wereldburgers voor de Klas creates a temporary space of orientation, practice, and support. At the same time, it also makes clear that these wider structural barriers do not disappear, even within the programme's supportive framework.

4.4.1 Access and conditions

Interest in Wereldburgers voor de Klas is high. Since 2023, nearly 3,000 applications have been submitted by migrants with a teaching background. Each year, around 300 participants are admitted to the programme, meaning that only a small fraction of the total applicants can be accommodated. Not everyone meets the admission criteria – such as official diploma recognition or a minimum language level of B1 – but the numbers show the existence of a large latent group that wishes to return to education. This demand stands in contrast to the limited capacity of the foundation, which is still relatively small and in development. Access also differs significantly between regions. In rural areas the number of places is sometimes only a handful, leaving interested candidates without a trajectory. In cities, demand is so high that not everyone can participate. One respondent explained that he knew hundreds of colleagues who wanted to apply but were unable to gain entry. This underlines that Wereldburgers voor de Klas can only absorb part of the demand, and that participation depends heavily on (regional) circumstances. The logic of formal requirements is visible here as well. Those without recognised diplomas or sufficient language skills are excluded. To a degree this is understandable: somewhere a line must be drawn to guarantee that teachers meet basic standards and can function in the classroom. Yet when this logic is combined with the programme's limited capacity, the outcome is that a very large share of migrant teachers never even gets the chance to participate. This leads to repeating familiar patterns of exclusion, filtering out those teachers who actually might need the most support to find their way back into the profession.

4.4.2 Community and belonging

As discussed in Chapter 2, migrant teachers often felt isolated in schools: without access to networks, literally placed at the back of the classroom or on the margins of the staffroom. Against this backdrop, the community aspect of Wereldburgers voor de Klas took on special significance. Nearly all participants emphasised that the programme provided not only knowledge, but also the feeling of being part of a group. For many, it was the first time they were not the only one but could search for their path alongside others. Informal conversations during breaks, the recognition of shared obstacles, and the exchange of hopes and frustrations were described as at least as valuable as the formal lessons. One participant put it simply: 'for the first time in a long time, I no longer felt alone.' Hearing the success stories of peers likewise offered hope and motivation, reinforcing the sense that they were not navigating the system entirely on their own.

4.4.3 Internship experiences

The internship is one of the programme's most important elements. It gives migrant teachers the chance to experience Dutch school practice up close and to re-engage with their subject. Yet experiences varied widely. Some participants noted that they had hoped Wereldburgers voor de Klas would provide direct connections with schools and arrange placements for them. In practice, they often had to search for an internship themselves, with guidance and support from the programme, but this still felt like a missed opportunity, since many expected that such partnerships would already be in place.

For those who did find a good match, the internship could be a turning point: they guided small groups of pupils, prepared lessons, or were given specific responsibilities. Their visible presence in the classroom allowed them to feel like teachers again and to gradually rebuild their professional identity. For others, however, the placement was far more limited. They were positioned literally at the back of the classroom, tasked mainly with observing. Their presence was acknowledged, but pedagogically they were hardly involved. For them, the internship felt more like a formality than a learning experience. This spatial positioning, as also noted in Chapter 2, made tangible how unequal the opportunities were to re-establish themselves as teachers.

These differences reflect not only individual trajectories but also wider ambiguities. From both the migrant teachers I interviewed and the schools I spoke with, it became clear that host schools are not always informed about what is expected of them. Should they merely provide a placement, or also systematic guidance? Should migrant teachers be treated like Dutch student teachers still in training, or does their prior experience require a different approach? This lack of clarity creates inconsistencies and

undermines the effectiveness of the internship. A more structured framework facilitated by Wereldburgers voor de Klas could better prepare schools and mentors to support migrant teachers in ways that recognise both their expertise and their needs.

Ultimately, the internship does not automatically lead to professionalisation. Its success depends heavily on the commitment of the host school and the willingness of mentors to give migrant teachers an active role. The programme opens the door to the classroom, but what happens inside determines whether the process of becoming a teacher again truly takes off.

4.4.4 Content and guidance

What made Wereldburgers voor de Klas valuable to participants was not any single component, but the combination of different forms of support. NT2 lessons, workshops, and coaching each had their own strengths and shortcomings. On their own, none of these would have been sufficient to prepare migrant teachers for re-entering the profession. Taken together, however, they create a framework in which teachers can build language skills, gain orientation, and receive personal recognition. It is precisely this interplay that give the programme its unique significance.

For nearly all participants, the Dutch language lessons formed the foundation of the programme. As earlier chapters have shown, language is both a barrier and a bridge: without it, teachers cannot manage classrooms, collaborate with colleagues, or regain authority. The lessons were therefore experienced as indispensable. At the same time, many noted the limitations of the NT2 lessons. Everyday phrases crucial for classroom management or parent–teacher meetings were rarely addressed, while there was also a strong demand for subject-specific vocabulary in mathematics, science, or grammar. The assumption that such terminology would be picked up during internships often proved unrealistic, as placements tended to focus on observation rather than explicit practice. To strengthen the programme, participants suggested a more targeted approach to language: greater attention to the short, practical phrases needed in classrooms, structured training in subject-specific terminology, and stronger alignment between language lessons and what is practiced during internships.

The workshops complemented language training by offering broader orientation. Covering a wide range of topics, from curriculum knowledge and classroom management to job applications and global citizenship, they helped participants navigate the Dutch education system and connected to the theme of social embedding discussed in Chapter 2. Participants appreciated the variety and agreed that the workshops provided a valuable first introduction to a school system that was largely unfamiliar to them. At the same time, many stressed that it was impossible to master new practices in a single session. Especially in areas such as digital systems, classroom management, or job applications, they expressed

the need for more repetition and depth. On their own, the workshops therefore sometimes lacked the continuity required to anchor new competences.

Participants described the coaching sessions offered during the programme as the first space where they felt taken seriously as professionals, not just as learners. A coach who reviewed job applications, helped reflect on challenges, or simply listened in moments of doubt provided crucial encouragement. Coaching bridged the gap between the general aims of the programme and the individual needs of participants, offering recognition that was sometimes missing in schools.

4.4.5 Progression and follow-up

Although participation opens doors, the programme does not automatically lead to a permanent position. Especially in social science and language subjects, progression to steady employment is limited. STEM fields provide somewhat more opportunities, for instance through laboratory assistant or teaching roles, but even their continuity is far from guaranteed. Respondents emphasized the need for more structural security: longer trajectories, better matching with schools, and possibilities to remain connected to the network after completion. Without such follow-up, participants risk falling back into uncertainty despite the initial hope the programme offers. At the same time, it should be noted that in a shifting education landscape marked by budget cuts and staff shortages, neither the programme nor individual schools can realistically guarantee positions. This tension underscores both the value and the limits of initiatives like Wereldburgers voor de Klas. They provide orientation and access but cannot on their own resolve the structural precarity of the sector.

Through this temporary community, participants experienced a sense of collegiality and community that they often missed in regular schools. Being surrounded by others with similar backgrounds and challenges gave them a feeling of belonging and recognition that contrasted with the isolation many had described in their school placements. Yet this sense of connection proved fragile. Once the programme ended, the group dispersed and the support that had felt so vital quickly faded. Several respondents therefore stressed the importance of building structures that could carry this sense of community forward. For instance, alumni networks, regular follow-up meetings, or online forums. In their view, such initiatives could help transform the temporary solidarity of the programme into a more durable professional network and prevent the abrupt return to isolation that many otherwise experienced.

4.5 Summary of empirical findings

This chapter has shown that the journey of migrant teachers in the Netherlands is complex and multilayered. Their experiences are shaped by the interaction between structural procedures, such as diploma recognition and language requirements, and the everyday realities of school life. While these procedures are designed to ensure quality and consistency, they often produce uncertainty and delay, leaving teachers in prolonged periods of transition. Within schools, the same dynamics take social form: who receives responsibilities, who is invited into informal networks, and who is trusted to lead a class all influence how belonging is felt. Small acts of recognition emerged as powerful signals that one's expertise is valued. At the same time, the persistence of temporary contracts and limited professional advancement shows how inclusion remains conditional and uneven across contexts. Programmes such as Wereldburgers voor de Klas demonstrate both the potential and the limits of targeted support. They offer migrant teachers a structured pathway to reconnect with teaching and rebuild professional confidence, yet their reach is small compared to the overall demand. Many qualified teachers remain outside these initiatives, unable to access the same opportunities for recognition and development. This tension illustrates how inclusion in Dutch education continues to depend on selective forms of access and institutional capacity. The following discussion builds on these findings to examine how belonging, professionalism, and recognition intersect in the Dutch educational field, and how these processes expose the boundaries of what is currently understood as 'integration.'

I come from Turkey and have been living in the Netherlands for four years. At the moment, I work at two different schools as a Physics TOA (Technical Education Assistant). I completed my degree in Physics, and in Turkey I worked for many years as a teacher and school leader. It is a wonderful experience for me to work in education in the Netherlands, because in my own country I also worked fully as a teacher. At the same time, I notice that, just like in many other aspects of life here, there is also a lot to learn in education. Every country has its own culture, and that also influences the way of teaching. Physics may be a universal subject, but the way you teach it and the way the relationship with students is shaped are not exactly the same.

That is why I need to adapt and keep learning all the time. The project I followed, Wereldburgers voor de Klas, helped me with this, but you still learn most things in practice, at school itself. Here, I am also starting to build beautiful memories. Working together with colleagues and supporting students in physics makes me happy. It is a nice feeling to walk again through school hallways filled with the voices of students. That is why I love education so much.

5. Discussion

This discussion interprets the findings from previous chapter through the theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter 2, examining how migrant teachers' belonging is shaped across the Dutch educational landscape. Following Klarenbeek (2019) and Schinkel (2018), integration is understood as a process that can either foster mutual transformation or reproduce inequality. In addition, inclusion is approached here not as a final outcome but as a dynamic and relational process, one that depends on how institutions, colleagues, and leaders engage with difference in practice (Omanović and Langley, 2021). Drawing on Yuval-Davis (2006) and Antonsich (2010), belonging is seen as the lived and political negotiation within institutional boundaries. Thereby this chapter will shift through three levels of analysis (Van Riemsdijk & Basford, 2021). At the national level, the discussion will focus on how systems of credential recognition and language regulation create symbolic boundaries of legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986). The regional level focuses on Wereldburgers voor de Klas as 'in-between spaces' (Ghorashi, 2006, 2020) that offer support but remain weakly connected to broader structures of governance (Van Riemsdijk & Basford, 2021). At the local level, schools emerge as everyday sites of belonging shaped by collegial interaction, shared values, leadership, and relationships with students (Freire, 2014; Wator et al., 2025). In this discussion, I argue that meaningful inclusion requires not only the efforts of migrant teachers to adapt, but also awareness, responsibility and dialogue from the institutions and actors around them. While the discussion is structured across three analytical levels, these levels are not separate spheres. Rather, they intersect and shape one another: national frameworks set the boundaries within which regional programmes operate, and schools translate those institutional norms into everyday practices. Yet, in turn, everyday practices and school cultures also feed back upward, influencing how programmes are designed and how policies are interpreted.

5.1 National level: integration, recognition and the boundaries of belonging

At the national level, integration operates as a state-led framework that claims to facilitate the equal participation of migrants but in practice regulates their access to key institutions. The experiences of migrant teachers with organisations such as DUO and Nuffic, the emphasis on language proficiency, and the prevalence of temporary contracts reveal that access to the Dutch educational field is not simply a matter of competence. Rather, it is embedded in institutional definitions of what constitutes educational quality. What policy frameworks present as a neutral system of recognition in practice functions as a set of symbolic boundaries (Bourdieu, 1986) that determine whose knowledge, qualifications, and linguistic practices are considered legitimate. For many migrant teachers, these boundaries are experienced as opaque and unpredictable. Respondents described waiting months for diploma validation, often without clear communication about the criteria or process. Some even lost original certificates, making formal

recognition nearly impossible. Many felt that their professional expertise and years of experience carried less weight than their Dutch language level. These experiences show that access to the profession is mediated not only by administrative requirements but also by cultural expectations of what a 'proper' teacher should be. However, while this discussion highlights how institutions such as DUO and Nuffic operate within a national framework of regulation and control, it is also important to recognise that Nuffic's mandate extends beyond national borders. As an organisation for internationalisation in education, Nuffic connects the Dutch system to broader transnational networks of knowledge exchange and credential recognition. In theory, this transnational orientation could offer migrant teachers an alternative space of engagement – one that acknowledges their professional trajectories as part of a global educational field rather than assessing them solely through Dutch standards. Yet, in practice, this potential remains largely untapped. The procedures through which migrant teachers must seek validation are still framed in national terms, reflecting an inward rather than outward perspective on professional recognition.

Building on Bourdieu's notion of symbolic boundaries, Yuval-Davis's (2006) framework highlights their political and affective dimensions. These boundaries are not merely bureaucratic but actively define who is regarded as a legitimate member of the Dutch educational field and under what conditions. The experiences of migrant teachers demonstrate that these boundaries influence not only whether they are able to enter schools but also how they are positioned once inside, often as temporary, dependent, or conditional professionals. The assumption that Dutch norms of language and professionalism represent the ideal reinforces the unequal positioning of those who must adapt to fit the system's definition of belonging (Buijs, Demant & Hamdy, 2006; De Vroome et al., 2014; Huijink & Dagevos, 2012; Verkuyten, 2016). This dynamic supports Schinkel's (2018) argument that integration is not a neutral policy goal but an ideological practice that portrays society as already complete while placing the burden of adaptation on the migrant. So-called objective standards of quality, professionalism, and sufficient Dutch in fact codify dominant cultural ideals of the 'proper' Dutch teacher, functioning as mechanisms of exclusion rather than neutral benchmarks. The criteria thus appear to safeguard existing conventions more than they evaluate pedagogical skill. Migrant teachers may be formally permitted to enter the system, yet their acceptance remains contingent on their ability to conform to institutional expectations of language, behaviour, and professionalism.

In line with Ghorashi's (2006, 2020) critique of cultural deficit thinking, the conditions for recognition are revealed to be not only technical but ideologically framed. The expectation that migrant teachers must first compensate for perceived 'deficits' before being recognised as equal professionals reinforces the association of difference with deficiency. This regulated form of access reveals that inclusion is conditional, as participation is allowed only within fixed institutional boundaries. Consequently, belonging becomes precarious, as if one's place must constantly be proven. Continuous evaluation is not incidental but structurally embedded in the system. Delayed diploma recognition, temporary

contracts, and ongoing language assessments create a prolonged period of uncertainty in which migrant teachers remain visible and employable, yet not fully acknowledged as equals.

Within this framework, the politics of belonging continually redraw the boundary between those who are fully accepted and those who are not. Migrant teachers thus inhabit an institutional liminality, essential to the education system, yet rarely positioned as its equal participants. This deficit logic exposes the limits of the so-called 'mutual adaptation' ideal. Rather than prompting institutions to reconsider their own norms, responsibility is individualised and structural barriers are reframed as personal shortcomings. The frustration and uncertainty described by teachers show how this logic is experienced not only as bureaucratic exclusion but also as personal devaluation. Thus, while integration operates as a state-driven project of regulation and recognition, belonging emerges as a lived and often fragile negotiation of legitimacy from the perspective of migrant teachers. Ultimately, these dynamics demonstrate that national-level integration policies function less as tools of recognition and more as boundary-making practices that sustain unequal forms of belonging. These institutional boundaries also reverberate downward, shaping how leadership and collegial relations in schools reproduce or resist the same hierarchies.

5.2 Regional level: transitional spaces as connective zones of belonging

Although I discussed the case study of Wereldburgers voor de Klas last in the previous chapter, I turn to it earlier here. Having addressed the national level, it is a logical next step to explore how belonging takes shape regionally. The case study of Wereldburgers voor de Klas illustrates how targeted initiatives can make a tangible difference in the professional reorientation of migrant teachers. Drawing on Ager and Strang's (2008) concept of opportunity structures, the programme can be understood as a temporary institutional framework that provides migrant teachers with structured access to language learning, professional orientation, and personalised coaching. It offers a supportive environment in which participants can begin to re-engage with their professional identities and navigate the expectations of the Dutch educational field. Building on this structural understanding, the programme also represents what Ghorashi (2020) calls an in-between space. It is a safe, transitional environment where participants can reflect on their experiences and reconnect with their professional identities. For many, it was the first place where they could once again see themselves as teachers, share experiences, and rebuild belonging. The significance of this space goes beyond practical training: it restores confidence, hope, and a sense of community that they often miss in mainstream Dutch education.

At the same time, the programme's design remains largely oriented towards the adaptation of migrant teachers to the Dutch educational system. As Klarenbeek (2019) argues, this reflects a predominantly one-sided integration perspective, in which the receiving structures continue to define the norm, while reflection on institutional contexts or reciprocal learning processes remains limited. This may show a

paradox of empowerment. Initiatives that try to support and strengthen migrant teachers can sometimes, without meaning to, keep the same hierarchies they want to change. By helping migrant teachers fit into the existing system instead of questioning it, they risk turning empowerment into a form of conformity. In this sense, Wereldburgers voor de Klas functions as a designed liminal space, temporarily suspending hierarchies and offering recognition, yet without requiring the school field itself to change. Once participants transition from the programme into schools, the capital and confidence gained inside the training space often fail to translate into symbolic capital recognised by school leaders or colleagues. What appears as an 'opportunity structure' therefore risks dissolving at precisely the point where belonging must become durable. This orientation is also understandable, as the programme operates within the same institutional logic it seeks to prepare migrant teachers for. Nevertheless, greater attention could be given to how its insights and practices are transferred to schools, where they might contribute to more sustainable and reciprocal forms of integration.

In line with Van Riemsdijk and Basford (2021), the findings highlight a lack of coordination between actors and levels of governance. Programmes such as Wereldburgers voor de Klas fill important gaps within this fragmented system, offering migrant teachers structured opportunities for professional reorientation and belonging. Yet their intermediary position between national and local levels also makes them politically vulnerable. These initiatives can easily be presented as evidence that integration is being supported, while the underlying structures that define who must adapt and under what conditions remain unchanged. As a result, regional programmes may display inclusion symbolically, while the responsibility for adjustment continues to rest largely on migrant teachers themselves. A more sustainable approach – grounded in longer trajectories, continuous guidance, and institutional cooperation – would strengthen the connection between individual potential and systemic transformation. The key challenge, therefore, is to ensure that the belonging nurtured within these training programmes extends beyond them and becomes embedded in the everyday practices, recognition structures, and pedagogical cultures of schools. This transitional character of Wereldburgers voor de Klas also reflects the ambiguous position that migrant teachers often encounter once they enter schools: they are formally included but remain socially peripheral. In this sense, the programme serves as a microcosm of the broader dynamics of belonging in Dutch education, where recognition and exclusion coexist. The negotiations of legitimacy that begin within such training spaces continue in everyday interactions with colleagues and leaders. These lived negotiations are not isolated from national policy or regional initiatives. They are their embodied expression, where what appears in policy as 'integration trajectories' materialises as subtle power relations in staffrooms, classrooms, and leadership structures.

5.3 Local level: Schools as social and spatial field of (non-)belonging

The findings of my thesis show that schools function as a social field where belonging, recognition, and professional identity are continuously negotiated by migrant teachers. It is not only an institutional structure with rules and hierarchies but also a relational and lived space produced through everyday interactions (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). Within this space, specific forms of cultural and symbolic capital are valued differently (Bourdieu, 1989). For instance, language proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and communication styles become key markers of legitimacy. Migrant teachers must therefore navigate what counts as legitimate capital and adapt their professional habitus to align with the norms of the Dutch educational field.

At the same time, following Freire's (2014) view of education as a dialogical and transformative practice, schools also hold the potential to become spaces of mutual learning and empowerment. The sense of belonging depends not only on interpersonal goodwill but also on how institutions communicate expectations, distribute authority, and define 'good teaching.' Viewed through Freire's idea of emancipatory learning environments, schools could become spaces where power relations are reconfigured and professional knowledge is co-constructed rather than merely transmitted. However, to what extent are schools open to seeing migrant teachers' contributions as opportunities for professional growth, rather than as challenges to existing authority? Is inclusion in Dutch education understood as a process of adapting to established norms, or as a shared effort to rethink what counts as quality and professionalism?

Building on Wator, Patrick and Yip (2025), belonging can be understood here through five dimensions: collegial interaction, shared values, leadership, recognition, and relationships with students. These dimensions illuminate how workplace belonging (the daily experience of inclusion and trust) and professional belonging (identification with the profession and its values) intersect. Although recognition is listed here as one of the dimensions, the findings of this study show that it is closely connected to all the others. Rather than discussing it as a separate theme, recognition is understood here as something that runs through every part of belonging. It appears in how migrant teachers experience collegiality, whether they feel they share values with their colleagues, how leaders interact with them, and in the dynamics of their relationships with students. In this way, recognition connects the personal, relational, and institutional aspects of belonging.

Collegial interaction

The first dimension, collegial interaction, refers to how everyday encounters shape feelings of support, trust, and inclusion. Although it may appear as an informal aspect of school culture, the experiences of migrant teachers show that it plays a crucial role in shaping belonging. In addition, as Antonsich (2010)

reminds us, belonging is lived and spatial. In the staffroom and during team meetings, feelings of belonging or exclusion can emerge through the smallest gestures: who is greeted, who is invited to lunch, at what pace colleagues speak, and who is addressed or included in conversation. In the classroom, several migrant teachers described being physically positioned at the back as interns and assistants, expected to observe rather than to lead. This arrangement not only symbolised their provisional professional status but also shaped how others perceived their role and competence. Yet, as some teachers noted, the question is not only where one is placed, but also which position one dares, or feels permitted, to take. Such spatial and symbolic positioning exposes the unequal distribution of authority within the school's social field. It shows that belonging is not only emotional but also spatial, shaped by both institutional arrangements and personal agency, by how space is given and how it is claimed.

These micro-practices reflect what Bourdieu describes as the dominant habitus of the school. They reveal the taken-for-granted norms that define what counts as normal collegiality, while marginalising those unfamiliar with them. To participate fully, one must often understand and navigate the school's implicit social codes, the subtle ways of speaking, behaving, and interacting that signal belonging. Some migrant teachers recalled moments when they felt overlooked or invisible to their colleagues. They noted that limited Dutch proficiency or uncertainty about cultural references could make informal interactions more challenging, but these difficulties were often intensified by a lack of active engagement or openness from others. This shows that belonging, therefore, is not simply a matter of individual adaptation but a shared responsibility that also depends on colleagues' willingness to create spaces for connection. As Wator et al. (2025) observe, belonging often grows through small, everyday exchanges. This was evident in my study as well. Migrant teachers described feeling seen when colleagues took the time to engage, ask questions, or adapt their communication to ensure understanding. Such moments were experienced as affirmations of professional worth and social recognition. However, these experiences also raise a critical question: what prevents such gestures from becoming the norm? Is it a lack of awareness among colleagues, or do institutional and cultural factors sustain patterns of exclusion? Future initiatives might therefore focus not only on supporting migrant teachers' adaptation but also on cultivating collective awareness and responsibility for inclusive collegiality.

Shared values and pedagogical culture

The second dimension, shared values, highlights that in order to feel part of a school community, teachers need to identify with the values and beliefs that are collectively upheld. In many schools, so-called Dutch pedagogical values are presented as self-evident markers of good teaching. For migrant teachers, however, these values often represent culturally specific norms they must learn and embody in order to be recognized as professional. Many participants described how they sought to align themselves with these expectations while simultaneously reinterpreting their prior pedagogical beliefs

to preserve meaning within the new context. As Yip (2023) notes, such a process often involves a sense of professional vulnerability. This feeling of uncertainty does not stem solely from personal doubt but also from shifting norms around what is considered professional. In my findings, this vulnerability emerges as a structural phenomenon in which migrant teachers must constantly negotiate the boundaries of legitimacy within the educational field. Their efforts to bridge different pedagogical traditions can be understood through what Erel (2010) describes as the re-evaluation of cultural capital: previously acquired knowledge and experience are not simply replaced but strategically repositioned to retain significance and value. My findings show, however, that this re-evaluation does not automatically lead to shared understanding or equal recognition. It unfolds within a field where certain pedagogical values are presented as universal and self-evident, while others are barely acknowledged as legitimate forms of knowledge. This dynamic limits the possibility of truly developing shared values. From the critical perspectives of Freire (2014) and Ghorashi (2020), these adaptive processes can be seen as moments of awareness and emerging dialogue. They are situations in which migrant teachers attempt to redefine the meaning of professional practice, yet structural boundaries often constrain such exchanges. Although some teachers experienced moments of recognition or meaningful dialogue, these remained incidental and largely dependent on individual openness. Without institutional willingness to actively foster dialogical spaces, the responsibility for adaptation continues to fall primarily on migrant teachers themselves, leaving diversity in practice subordinate to conformity.

<u>Leadership and institutional support</u>

The third dimension, leadership, represents a crucial link within the institutional dimension of belonging. School leaders occupy an influential position in the network of actors shaping integration processes for migrant teachers (van Riemsdijk & Basford, 2021). They are connected to school boards, professional networks, teacher education programmes, and policy bodies, while also being directly engaged with the everyday realities of their teams. This position grants them influence not only over structural decisions, such as hiring practices and access to professional development, but also over the social cohesion within the team. For migrant teachers, leadership is therefore more than an organisational function. Rather, it is a determining factor in their access to professional recognition and their sense of belonging within the school. The findings indicate that the attitudes and choices of school leaders are closely linked to how migrant teachers experience their place within the team. When leaders actively build connections between different actors and create space for collaboration and dialogue within the team, this can significantly enhance the sense of belonging of migrant teachers. In this sense, leadership is more than a matter of style or personal quality. It represents a structural responsibility to create conditions in which everyone can feel part of the school community, fostering the kind of mutual accommodation that Klarenbeek (2019) describes as essential for genuine two-way integration. Since this study focused on

the experiences of migrant teachers rather than those of school leaders themselves, their perspectives remain largely outside the scope of this analysis. For this reason, their role is an important starting point for future research, not to evaluate individual leaders but to understand how leadership can support the sense of belonging of migrant teachers.

Relationships with students

The final dimension of teacher belonging, as outlined by Wator et al. (2025), centers on relationships with students. For many migrant teachers, these daily interactions are where the job feels most alive. They are the moments that restore purpose and remind them why they entered the profession in the first place. Several participants described how they had to rebuild their authority in classrooms where communication was more informal and students more outspoken than they were used to. Just like in the other dimensions, language played a crucial role in this process. Giving instructions or restoring order required not only linguistic proficiency but also sensitivity to tone, rhythm, and cultural nuance. Minor misunderstandings could quickly undermine authority, revealing how professionalism in the classroom often depends on implicit norms of what counts as 'good teaching.'

Wator et al. (2025) emphasize the reciprocal dynamic between teachers and students, yet following Freire (2014) and Ghorashi (2020), this can also be understood as a pedagogical responsibility. Taking reciprocity seriously means that schools must prepare students to learn and work with teachers from diverse backgrounds, since they too participate in the same social space where belonging is formed. Without such awareness, integration remains a one-sided process in which migrant teachers must adapt to existing norms, while the classroom could instead serve as a setting where students also learn to engage with difference, power, and mutual dependence. A genuinely dialogical school culture therefore requires not only inclusive leadership and collegial support but also the cultivation of student awareness and shared responsibility for inclusive relationships. Only then can the classroom become a space where difference is not merely tolerated but actively learned, recognised, and valued.

The national, regional, and local analyses show that migrant teachers' belonging is produced in the intersections rather than within clearly separated layers of governance. National frameworks establish the symbolic and bureaucratic boundaries of legitimacy, regional programmes such as Wereldburgers voor de Klas mediate these boundaries by offering temporary spaces of recognition, and schools translate them into the everyday realities of interaction, trust, and professional value. Yet these levels continuously feed into one another, shaping what belonging can mean and where it can be realised. For migrant teachers, this creates a fluid and multi-layered sense of belonging: they must navigate different institutional expectations and power relations at once, while simultaneously asserting their own positionality and professional expertise. Belonging thus emerges not as a stable condition within one context, but as a negotiated, dynamic practice that is continually redefined across scales.

6. Epilogue: Recentring the Experiences of Migrant Teachers

This epilogue does not aim to summarise or conclude, but to return to the voices that have guided this study. The orientation of this thesis has always been towards the lived experiences and positioning of migrant teachers. In this final reflection, I wish to bring their stories to the centre once more – to think with them about what belonging, recognition, and teaching mean when seen beyond the framework of the nation-state.

Building on their narratives, thesis examined how migrant teachers experience their integration and sense of belonging in Dutch education, and how schools and training programmes influence that process. What emerges from their narratives is that re-entering their profession in education is not a linear process, but a continuous process of searching, adapting and regaining meaning. Their experiences reveal a mixture of frustration and hope, of perseverance and starting over. For these migrant teachers, teaching is not just a profession, but an essential part of their identity. It is their way of putting down new roots, of contributing to a new society through their profession and their humanity. Their desire to return to the classroom thus goes beyond economic participation, it is about regaining professional dignity and human recognition.

Although integration is often framed in policy as a 'two-way process,' the findings of this study suggest that, in practice, it remains largely one-sided and state-led. Institutions and policies set the terms of inclusion, while the responsibility to adapt lies mainly with migrant teachers. This asymmetry narrows the potential for genuine reciprocity and shared transformation. The lived experiences of migrant teachers show that real integration happens less through regulation and more through belonging in everyday recognition, trust, and dialogue within schools. These daily encounters, rather than formal procedures, are what render integration a relational and human process.

Many migrant teachers not only struggle to have their qualifications recognized, but also face difficulties even finding a job. They encounter structural obstacles such as the evaluation of diplomas, language requirements, and temporary contracts. While these regulations serve a legitimate purpose in ensuring quality and alignment with the Dutch educational system, in practice they do not always produce equitable outcomes. As a result, many experienced migrant teachers remain on the margins of the Dutch education system, struggling to gain full recognition as professionals. Procedures through agencies such as Nuffic and DUO are often slow, bureaucratic, and unclear, leaving many migrant teachers uncertain about what exactly is required to enter the Dutch education system. As a result, their previously acquired knowledge and experience are insufficiently recognised and valued. This highlights that access to the teaching profession depends not only on formal qualifications, but also on cultural professional recognition. It involves the extent to which one fits within the implicit norms of what is considered appropriate or fitting within the Dutch educational culture.

Language forms a recurring thread throughout this process for migrant teachers. It is both a prerequisite and a boundary. For many of them, language proficiency largely shapes their self-confidence as well as how colleagues, students, and parents perceive them. Uncertainty about language can lead to hesitation, while growth in language skills opens doors to contact and collaboration. In this sense, language is not only a means of communication but also a symbol of recognition. In schools where migrant teachers are given the space to learn without judgment, language proficiency naturally grows alongside confidence. Language development then becomes a shared pedagogical responsibility. It is a social process that flourishes within a culture of patience and understanding. Culture likewise plays an important role in this regard. Many schools have implicit rules about 'how things are done here,' such as norms of interaction, hierarchy, and relationships with students. Migrant teachers are often expected to intuitively understand and adopt these unspoken codes, while their own perspectives are rarely invited into the conversation. By intentionally creating room for cultural dialogue and making taken-for-granted assumptions open to discussion, schools can become more equitable and inclusive.

Belonging – understood in this study as the core of successful two-way integration – is not an endpoint but a relational, temporal and spatial process. It concerns not only the relationships between people but also the space and position one occupies or is granted within the school community. Belonging emerges in small, everyday moments such as a colleague expressing trust, a school leader who listens, or a student showing appreciation. Such gestures and spaces determine whether someone feels part of the community. In their absence, feelings of loneliness or invisibility can grow. Genuine belonging, therefore, requires more than physical presence. It depends on both the relationships one builds and the space one is afforded – or able to claim – within the school environment. It means being truly seen, heard, and taken seriously. From this perspective, belonging is not an individual pursuit but a shared responsibility. Schools and policymakers can foster inclusion by acknowledging and actively addressing inequalities. School leaders can link policy to trust and collective growth within their teams, while colleagues make inclusion tangible through everyday engagement and genuine interest. Students, too, play a role by showing curiosity and respect—an attitude that schools can consciously nurture.

Within this broader picture, training programmes such as Wereldburgers voor de Klas serve as an important bridge. These programmes offer a temporary safe space that is often missing in regular education: an environment in which migrant teachers can strengthen their language skills, translate their subject knowledge into the Dutch context, and, above all, regain recognition as fully qualified professionals. For many participants, taking part in such a programme is the first time they feel seen again, meet peers with similar experiences, and recover the confidence that they matter. Yet the impact of these programmes remains fragile as long as they are not structurally embedded within schools and educational policy. Without sustainable follow-up pathways, the sense of community often fades once the programme ends. To shift from temporary orientation to lasting integration, structural collaboration is needed between regional initiatives, schools, and policymakers, with clear post-programme

trajectories. This lack of continuity is particularly striking given the persistent teacher shortages in the Netherlands. Despite the urgent demand for qualified staff, the expertise and motivation of migrant teachers remain an underutilised resource. The absence of sustainable pathways not only wastes potential but also signals a missed opportunity to align inclusion goals with broader educational needs.

Migrant teachers themselves contribute actively by learning the language and culture, and by demonstrating motivation, willingness to learn, and resilience. They do not give up when faced with setbacks and dare to articulate what is difficult. It is precisely this openness and perseverance that make them valuable members of the school community. Many speak with gratitude about the opportunities they have received, such as the first internship, a school leader who expresses trust, a colleague who takes time to think along. Such moments are often experienced as turning points: the realization of once again being meaningful, of belonging to something larger.

This study thus reveals a significant, yet often underutilised, potential among migrant teachers in the Netherlands. However, realising this potential requires more than simply allowing them to enter schools. It calls for sustainable, two-way integration between institutions and individuals, where support, mentorship, and mutual recognition are integral rather than optional. Migrant teachers cannot and should not be expected to adapt in isolation. Schools and policymakers must also create the inclusive structural and cultural conditions in which their knowledge and experience can truly contribute to education. When migrant teachers are recognised as full members of the school community, inclusion and belonging reinforce one another: their ability to contribute grows as they feel at home, and their sense of belonging deepens as their contribution is valued. Only through such reciprocal engagement can integration become both meaningful and mutual.

As Paulo Freire (2000) emphasised, no one can truly be a teacher without showing who they are. For migrant teachers, this insight touches the very core of their journey. Their backgrounds, languages, and experiences are not merely obstacles but also sources of strength. When schools recognise this and create space for dialogue and a multiplicity of voices, genuine mutual learning, listening, and recognition become possible. In such a dialogical space, migrant teachers are not merely asked to adapt, but invited to share who they are and what they bring, while also learning from new contexts, colleagues, and classroom cultures. In this reciprocal process, belonging takes shape: migrant teachers gain confidence and a sense of contribution, while Dutch education itself is enriched by new collaborations, perspectives, and stories.

7. Recommendations

This study identifies several ways to strengthen the integration and sense of belonging of migrant teachers in Dutch education. This chapter presents recommendations at two levels: practical actions for different stakeholders and directions for future research. The first sections outline practical advice for policymakers, schools, training programmes, and migrant teachers themselves, followed by suggestions for future studies. I am aware that the actors involved already carry many responsibilities and may not be able to implement all of these recommendations at once. The intention is therefore not to prescribe a fixed set of actions, but to offer constructive reflections on what I have observed and what I believe could make a meaningful difference.

7.1 Recommendations for practice

7.1.1 Policy recommendations

1) Strengthen collaboration across policy levels: The current fragmentation between national policies, regional initiatives, and individual schools hinders continuity. Stakeholders still meet too infrequently, leaving valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and teacher mobility untapped. A stronger network connecting policymakers, labour market regions, education regions, municipalities, and training programmes is needed. Regular coordination meetings can foster shared responsibility and improve alignment between policy, implementation, and practice.

2) Reduce bureaucratic barriers in diploma recognition: Initiatives such as Wereldburgers voor de Klas demonstrate that targeted mentoring, language training, and networking can effectively support migrant teachers. However, these teachers primarily need long-term, stable support rather than short-term projects. Structural funding, nationwide coverage, and clear integration with policies addressing teacher shortages are essential to achieve lasting results and to embed the contribution of migrant teachers firmly within the education system.

3) Reduce bureaucratic barriers in diploma recognition: Many migrant teachers face slow and opaque recognition procedures. Agencies such as DUO and Nuffic should evaluate foreign qualifications more efficiently and with greater contextual sensitivity. In addition to formal diplomas, professional experience, years of teaching, pedagogical competence, and classroom intuition should also be recognised as valuable professional capital.

7.1.2 Recommendations for schools

1) View diversity as an asset, not a deviation: Schools should regard the cultural and pedagogical backgrounds of migrant teachers not as something 'different,' but as an opportunity for mutual growth. This requires a conscious shift away from an integration logic. Instead of expecting migrant teachers to continuously adapt to existing norms, schools should foster a dialogue-based approach that centres on reciprocal learning.

2: Cultivate inclusive collegiality: A sense of belonging is not created by policy alone, it also emerges through everyday interactions. In collegial relations, awareness of who is greeted, involved, and heard is crucial. Colleagues share a collective responsibility to actively include new team members, offer feedback, and encourage collaboration. Small gestures can make a significant difference. Inspired by Freire's concept of emancipatory learning spaces, schools can create regular moments for joint reflection on teaching practices and cultural perspectives. Such dialogical spaces strengthen professional equality and stimulate collective innovation.

3) Ensure fair and structural compensation for migrant teachers: Migrant teachers should receive fair pay for their work, both during internships and when they are employed. When they work without pay or for only a small allowance, it creates an unequal position within the team. Paying them fairly for their skills and previous experience is important for true inclusion and mutual respect at school. It also helps them become financially independent and no longer depend on social benefits.

4) Actively involve students: Students also play an important role in helping migrant teachers feel welcome and recognised within the school. Schools can engage students by creating intentional spaces for dialogue and reflection. For example, discussion sessions can encourage students to think critically about diversity, equality, and the value of multiple perspectives in the classroom. Schools might also organise projects or theme weeks on global citizenship, language, and cultural identity, where migrant teachers take on active roles as guest lecturers, mentors, or facilitators. In doing so, students learn that inclusion is not something done for them, but a shared responsibility among all members of the school community.

5) Develop mentoring and support structures based on reciprocity: Migrant teachers who have an engaged mentor within their school often feel most supported and valued. Mentorship should not focus solely on explaining the practices, routines, expactations and norms of the school, but foster mutual learning. Migrant teachers bring fresh ideas, experiences, and perspectives from which mentors themselves can benefit. In this way, mentoring becomes a reciprocal process: both parties learn from each other, reflect on their teaching practices, and deepen their understanding of difference. Mentors can be further supported through training in intercultural communication and reflective practice, helping to build an open and continuously learning school culture.

7.1.3 Recommendations for Wereldburgers voor de Klas

For elaborated recommendations and implementation details, see Appendix C.

1) Strengthen regional embedding and collaboration: Increase the regional visibility of Wereldburgers voor de Klas by investing in sustainable local partnerships with municipalities, schools, and universities of applied sciences. This enhances recognition, trust, and long-term impact

2) Integrate diversity, language, and practice: Broaden the diversity of participants and better align language training with classroom practice and internship experience. A more inclusive and practice-oriented approach strengthens participants' confidence, belonging, and professional readiness

3) Foster reciprocal integration and long-term support: Avoid a one-sided integration logic by promoting reflection and guidance within schools, and by developing alumni and networking structures that sustain professional growth beyond the programme.

7.1.4 Recommendations for migrant teachers

1) Recognise and build on personal agency: Migrant teachers bring with them not only subject-specific expertise, but also rich intercultural experiences and resilience developed through migration. They should be encouraged to actively recognise and articulate this professional capital. Reflective assignments, peer coaching, and personal learning journals can help participants become more aware of their strengths and agency in shaping their professional identity within the Dutch context.

2) Engage in continuous self-reflection and identity reconstruction: Integration is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of professional identity reconstruction. Participants are advised to engage in continuous reflection on how their previous teaching practices, values, and pedagogical styles connect to or differ from the Dutch educational culture. Through reflective practice – individually and in dialogue with mentors or peers – they can develop hybrid pedagogies that integrate their past expertise with new approaches.

3) Actively seek and cultivate professional networks: Isolation after programme completion can slow down integration. Participants are encouraged to join professional networks, alumni groups, or subject-specific teacher associations to expand their sense of belonging beyond the immediate school environment. Building these networks not only supports professional development but also reinforces recognition and visibility within the broader educational community.

4) Invest in language as professional tool: Rather than viewing Dutch language proficiency merely as a barrier, participants can approach it as an evolving professional skill. Engaging with subject-specific language, idiomatic classroom expressions, and professional jargon helps strengthen both confidence and credibility. Seeking opportunities to co-teach, present, or participate in professional discussions in Dutch accelerates this process.

5) Practice reciprocal learning: Belonging is not achieved by adaptation alone but through reciprocity. Migrant teachers can consciously share their own pedagogical insights, methods, and global perspectives with colleagues and students. By positioning themselves as contributors rather than learners only, they help reshape the school as a more inclusive learning space.

7.2 Recommendations for future research

This study represents one of the first in-depth academic explorations of migrant teachers' experiences in the Netherlands. Beyond a handful of evaluation reports on specific training programmes, little research has examined this group's perspectives in a systematic, qualitative way. Further empirical and theoretical work is therefore needed to deepen understanding of how integration and belonging unfold within Dutch education, and how these processes might become more reciprocal, sustainable, and inclusive.

At the macro level, future research could look more closely at the policies and institutional structures that frame migrant teachers' opportunities. How do reforms in diploma recognition, accreditation procedures, or language requirements influence who enters and stays in the profession? Studying these measures in practice could reveal how well-intentioned policies translate into real-world inclusion. Extending this analysis beyond the Netherlands would also be valuable. Comparative European research could show how countries such as Sweden, Germany, or the United Kingdom navigate similar challenges, and how their policy environments and educational traditions create different openings for belonging and professional recognition.

At the meso level, attention could shift to life inside schools, the spaces where national policy meets everyday practice. Research could explore how migrant teachers and their Dutch colleagues experience collaboration, mentorship, and professional exchange. Understanding these relationships would help to reframe integration as a two-way process, one that depends as much on openness within school teams as on the adaptation of newcomers. Longitudinal studies could add a valuable dimension here, following teachers over several years to trace how their sense of belonging, stability, and recognition evolves once they are employed. Such work could identify which forms of support make a lasting difference, and where new pressures arise over time.

At the micro level, the focus could turn to the lived and spatial dimensions of belonging, the everyday realities that unfold in classrooms, corridors, and staff rooms. As this study has shown, schools are more than workplaces; they are social worlds where policy, identity, and relationships intersect. Ethnographic and participatory methods, such as school-based ethnographies or participatory mapping, could offer rich insights into how migrant teachers navigate these spaces. An intersectional approach would further deepen this perspective by showing how gender, migration history, ethnicity, religion, and educational background come together to shape legitimacy and belonging. Moreover, future research could also examine experiences across different subject areas, as disciplinary cultures may shape how belonging and professional legitimacy are negotiated. For instance, language teachers, STEM educators, and arts teachers might encounter distinct expectations, challenges, and opportunities for adaptation. In addition, given that most respondents in this study were working in secondary education, it would be valuable to extend this inquiry to primary schools. Exploring how migrant teachers experience their entry into primary education – where pedagogical relationships, staff communities, and communication with children differ considerably – could offer important insights into how inclusion and belonging unfold across educational levels. Finally, classroom observation remains a crucial step. Watching how inclusion and recognition are enacted or at times challenged in lessons, team meetings, and informal interactions would ground our understanding of belonging in the texture of everyday pedagogical life.

These suggestions point to an urgent need for more sustained academic and public attention to the experiences of migrant teachers in the Netherlands. Their stories illuminate broader questions about how belonging and professionalism are defined, who is recognised as a teacher, and how schools can become genuinely inclusive spaces. Understanding these processes in greater depth is not only a matter of research interest, but also of educational and social responsibility.

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Appendix A: Survey questionnaire

The survey questions were developed in consultation with staff members of the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme. Together, we reviewed the wording and structure of the questions to ensure that the language was accessible and culturally appropriate for all participants. The final version of the questionnaire was administered in Dutch, as this was the common working language of the programme and of most participants.

- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What is your country of origin?
- How long have you lived in the Netherlands?
- What is your current housing situation?
- In which province do you currently live in the Netherlands?
- How would you describe your current financial situation?
- Do you currently receive social benefits?
- What is your current level of Dutch language proficiency?
- Have you worked in education in your country of origin?
- Which subject did you teach in your country of origin?
- Do you hold a DUO teaching qualification in the Netherlands?
- Are your foreign diplomas and work experience recognized in the Dutch education system?
- How many years did you work in education in your country of origin?
- In which phase of the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme are you currently?
- What is the reason you are currently not working in Dutch education?
- Did you complete an internship or work placement during the programme?
- How long have you been working in Dutch education?
- In which education sector are you currently working?
- Are you currently doing an internship or work placement in Dutch education?
- Why are you not currently doing an internship or work placement?
- In which education sector are/were you doing your internship or work placement?
- In which education sector would you like to work in the future?
- I feel confident to work as a teacher or teaching assistant in Dutch education.
- Do you find it difficult to adjust to Dutch education?
- What do you find most challenging?
- There are people with different cultural backgrounds working at my school.
- At my school, there is attention for different cultures and backgrounds.
- I am treated the same way as my colleagues.

- I feel free to teach in my own way and to share my cultural background.
- My cultural background is respected at school.
- I notice that my cultural background adds something positive in my classroom.
- I have the same opportunities for professional growth as my colleagues.
- I feel free to be myself at work.
- I know who to turn to if I experience discrimination at school.
- I regularly talk with colleagues about cultural differences and teaching approaches.
- I feel part of the teaching team.
- Communication with my colleagues goes well.
- I feel at home at school.
- I trust my colleagues.
- I feel comfortable asking colleagues for help when I have a problem.
- I have contact with colleagues outside of work.
- I feel that I receive the same opportunities as other teachers.
- I participate in school activities outside the classroom (e.g., parent meetings, open days, staff meetings, excursions).
- How often do you collaborate with Dutch colleagues?
- What overall rating would you give to the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme?
- What do you find most valuable about the programme?
- Which components of the programme did you find most useful?
- Is there anything you would like to see improved in the programme?
- Would you recommend this programme to other migrant teachers?
- Why would you recommend it?
- Why would you not recommend it?
- For this research, I would also like to interview participants for a longer conversation (about 30 minutes), either online or in person. Would you be open to this?
- Thank you for being willing to continue the conversation! Could you please leave your name, email address, and phone number?

Appendix B: Interview guide

This guide was used as a general framework for the semi-structured interviews. The questions served as a starting point, but depending on participants' answers, follow-up questions were asked to explore their personal experiences, reflections, and stories in greater depth.

- Could you please introduce yourself?

- Which subject did you teach in your country of origin?

- Why did you decide to participate in the Wereldburgers voor de Klas programme?

- In which phase of the programme are you currently?

- What were your expectations of the programme?

- To what extent have these expectations been met?

- Could you tell me about the new knowledge and skills you have gained during the programme?

- Has the programme helped you feel better prepared for teaching in the Netherlands? How?

- What did you think of the guidance and supervision provided during the programme?

- Are there any other skills you would have liked to develop?

- (If the programme has been completed:) Have you found a job? How did this process go?

- Do you think your participation in the programme has improved your chances of finding a teaching job in the Netherlands? Why or why not?

- Do you feel welcome in Dutch education?

- Do you feel that your cultural background and experience are valued at your school? Could you give an example?

- Have you ever faced challenges because of your background? How did you deal with them?

- Does your background influence the way you teach? Could you give an example?

- What do you think your cultural background and experiences contribute to your work as a teacher?

- How do students respond to your presence as a teacher with a different cultural background?

- Do you feel that your opinions and experiences as a migrant teacher are appreciated?

- Are there any aspects of the programme you would like to see changed?

- What advice would you give to future participants of the programme?

- Where do you see yourself in five years?

Appendix C: Recommendations for Wereldburgers voor de Klas

<u>Increase regional visibility and invest in sustainable embedding of the programme</u>

Wereldburgers voor de Klas plays an important national role, yet it remains relatively unknown or difficult to access in many regions. The programme should therefore invest more in regional presence and collaboration with municipalities, labour market regions, schools, and universities of applied sciences. Building targeted regional networks, appointing local contact persons, and sharing success stories can enhance recognition and trust. In this way, the programme can grow into a well-established regional network that not only supports migrant teachers but also inspires schools to actively contribute to inclusion and diversity.

<u>Enhance diversity among programme participants</u>

Currently, most participants come from a Turkish background. Broadening the programme's reach to include teachers with different migration histories, cultural backgrounds, and professional experiences would make it both more representative and more impactful. A wider mix of participants would create richer opportunities for peer learning and intercultural exchange. Greater diversity would also strengthen the sense of community within the programme itself, ensuring that participants who do not share the majority background feel equally recognised and supported. To achieve this, the programme could expand its outreach efforts, build partnerships with a wider range of migrant communities, and adapt its recruitment materials to appeal to a broader audience.

<u>Strengthen the practical relevance of language education</u>

Participants indicated that language training could be more closely aligned with their professional practice. Dutch language courses should place greater emphasis on subject-specific and classroom language rather than general grammar. By integrating language lessons with lesson preparation and classroom observation, language development becomes directly connected to the teaching context. This not only strengthens participants' confidence and communication skills in the classroom but also enables schools to employ them more effectively as fully qualified professionals.

<u>Avoid a one-sided integration logic</u>

At present, Wereldburgers voor de Klas primarily prepares participants to function within the Dutch educational system – an important and necessary focus for enabling them to work effectively in schools. However, for a programme like Wereldburgers voor de Klas, it is equally essential not to reinforce a one-sided logic of integration. Although it is not the programme's responsibility to change schools themselves, it can play an important role in stimulating and facilitating reflection within schools and encouraging them to engage in reciprocal learning processes. This can be achieved by offering guidance and resources for mentors, school leaders, and fellow teachers on inclusive supervision, intercultural sensitivity, and reflective practice. By prompting schools to examine their own assumptions, communication styles, and expectations, the programme can help create the conditions for mutual understanding and shared professional growth. In this way, integration becomes a collective process, supported not only by individual teachers but by the broader educational environment.

Provide more guidance to schools

This recommendation builds on the previous point about promoting reciprocal learning within schools. Many schools are uncertain about what to expect or how best to support migrant teachers. Wereldburgers voor de Klas could play a more active role by developing clear information, guidelines, and practical materials on mentoring, communication, and role division. Training sessions or introductory meetings for mentors and teaching teams could help prepare them for working with migrant teachers. The programme could also develop teaching materials and activities that engage students in themes such as diversity and global citizenship. By giving migrant teachers a visible role in these initiatives, as guest teachers, mentors, or facilitators, students learn to appreciate multiple perspectives and to see language and background as valuable elements of education. Strengthening schools in this way also lays the foundation for more meaningful and active internships, where migrant teachers can participate fully and contribute their expertise. Clearer structures and shared understanding between schools and the programme can thus support both effective guidance and richer learning experiences

Align language training, internships, and workshops more effectively

The different components of the programme sometimes operate too independently, making it difficult for participants to connect what they learn with what they experience in practice. Greater coherence, through shared assignments, reflection moments, or thematic learning pathways, would help integrate knowledge, language, and classroom experience. When language training, internship practice, and workshops reinforce one another, participants gain not only confidence but also the ability to apply what they have learned directly in the classroom.

Build an alumni and networking structure

After completing the programme, many participants experience a sense of isolation. An active alumni network offering peer support, coaching, and job exchange could foster long-term professional integration and knowledge sharing. Such a network could also support new participants and inspire schools with examples of successful trajectories. A buddy system, pairing alumni with new participants, could encourage the exchange of experiences, practical tips, and motivation. This would create a continuous learning chain in which knowledge and confidence are passed on. At the same time, showcasing success stories through the network would highlight the lasting value of migrant teachers as an essential and enriching force within education.