

# Low-literate migrants and the consequences of language and KoS requirements for citizenship

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Since the turn of the millennium, a growing number of European countries have introduced language and knowledge of society (KoS) tests for migrants applying for residency and citizenship (Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers 2020). Today, only a few countries do not have such requirements, Ireland and Sweden among them (see Groarke et al. 2020 on the Irish case and Milani et al. 2021 on Sweden). A claim that such requirements increase migrants' motivation for language learning and integration has been used to justify their introduction in Europe (Strik et al. 2010, Carlsen & Bugge 2021). Yet there is little empirical evidence supporting the assumption of a positive effect of language and KoS requirements on the integration of immigrants in general. As KoS tests are in most cases conducted in the majority language of the host country (Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers 2020), they often function as *de facto* language tests, and in some cases also as *de facto* literacy tests, and from the viewpoint of applied linguistics, we may analyse language tests as explicit language requirements, and majority language KoS tests as implicit language tests. A particular concern at the introduction of such migrations tests is their consequences for those migrants for whom the requirements represent considerable barriers, such as migrants with low levels of print literacy and formal schooling (Strik et al. 2010, van Oers 2014, Bech et al. 2017, Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers 2020, Carlsen & Rocca 2021), a learner and test taker group is often referred to as LESLLA<sup>1</sup> learners.

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<sup>1</sup> The acronym LESLLA refers to Literacy Education and Second Language Learning in Adults, see <https://www.leslla.org/research>, and the term 'LESLLA-learners' refers to adult second language learners with little prior schooling and/or low levels of literacy.

The following paper is based in the research project [IMPECT](#) (2021-2025) anchored at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and financed by the Norwegian Research Council, with the aim to investigate how citizenship requirements impact low-literate adult migrants' motivation for language learning and integration in Europe. IMPECT is an interdisciplinary project rooted in applied linguistics, particularly in language testing research, second language acquisition research and sociolinguistics, and with a project group with backgrounds from applied linguistics, language testing and assessment, sociology, education research, philosophy, and law. The project is currently in the early stages of data collection and preparations and will within a few years be able to present findings from analyses of data from test scores and background data on 70 000 test takers from the Norwegian language and KoS test, data from a teacher survey in 20 Council of Europe member states, analyses from interviews with LESLLA teachers in five European countries, and from interviews with LESLLA learners in three European countries<sup>2</sup>.

The following paper provides insight into current knowledge on low-literate adult migrants' language learning and performance in high-stakes language tests and provides a preliminary discussion of two extracts from interviews with low-literate refugees conducted so far in the project.

### **Language requirements, and the relation between language and borders**

Even though formal language requirements for citizenship were uncommon in Europe before year 2000 (Extra, Spotti & Van Avermaet 2009, Slade & Möllering 2010) many countries had implicit and/or unspecified language requirements for naturalisation also earlier on (Oers 2014: 41-43, see also Hårstad, forthcoming), a system vulnerable to unpredictable outcomes and discrimination. Though the introduction of language tests in many cases represented a tightening of requirements their introduction may thus have led to fairer judgement, in the sense that applicants had a better chance of equal treatment and transparency in their evaluation. However, as for example McNamara & Ryan (2011)

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<sup>2</sup> See project description here: <https://www.hvl.no/globalassets/hvl-internett/dokument/flki/impect/impect-prosjektbeskrivelse-oppdater-4.2.2021.pdf>

have argued, the questions of fairness and justice in language testing go beyond ensuring equal treatment of test takers. For the evaluation of justice, language test research has for the last 30-40 years stressed the need to look also at consequences, whether intended or unintended, for test-taker groups (O'Sullivan & Green 2011: 37, Carlsen & Rocca 2021). Within language testing research, the direction focusing most consistently and explicitly on the misuse and potentially harmful consequences of language tests is critical language testing (CLT) (Shohamy 2001, 2007). Shohamy & McNamara (2009:1) stress the fact that even when the intended purpose of a test is positive, the unintended consequences may be detrimental, and Carlsen & Rocca (2022) discuss test developers' professional responsibility to take action both to detect and to prevent their tests from being misused (see also Messick 1989, 1995's definition of validity in language tests, and the continuation of this definition in Shohamy 2001 and in McNamara & Ryan 2011).

Within applied linguistics, language tests research (and CLT in particular) is one of the branches with the most developed tradition to evaluate and object to real-world consequences and misuse of scientific labor. As a larger discipline, linguistics has its scientific roots closely connected to the construction of the foundation for a monolingual nation-state ideology (Ortega 2019). Heller (2008: 510) shows how linguists of former centuries have contributed to an ideology in which language is both limitable and connected to geographical place and nation, which has been continued in dialectology and sociolinguistics' long-standing "preoccupation with community (and therefore with boundaries) and identity (who belongs and who doesn't)". For most current sociolinguists, modern formalizations of such historical concepts of predictable relationships between language, place, ethnicity and belonging, contrast with prevailing understandings of the relationship between language use, identity and belonging as complex, dynamic and socially situated (see for example Heller 2008, Auer 2013, Røyneland 2017, Cornips & Rooij 2018, Rheindorf & Wodak 2020). Yet, the heritage from earlier contributions from the discipline is traced in the ongoing public discourse in which linguistic plurality, both old and new, is perceived as political problems (Kahn 2016, Bugge 2021, see also Bruzos, Erdocia & Kahn 2018's expansion of Blommaert & Verschueren 1998's "dogma of homogeneity"), and the discourse in which language requirements for citizenship have historically been portrayed not only as a protection for the nation, but also as a necessary ticket or door-opener for new members. An expanding

gap between the scientific communities on the one hand, and decision-makers on the other hand, is visible in several cases in migration testing. The use of language tests as evidence material to determine the geographical and ethnic origin of asylum seekers has been criticized<sup>3</sup> for being “based on ‘folk views’ about the relation between language and nationality and ethnicity, rather than sound linguistic principles” (Eades et al. 2003:179, see also discussions of LADO tests in Arends et al. 2004, Maryns 2005, McNamara, Verrips & van den Hazelkamp 2010, Baltisberger & Hubbuch 2010, McNamara, Patrick 2012, Schmid 2019, Zwaan et al. 2019, Bugge 2021). Host country language requirements for entrance, residency and citizenship have similarly been criticized for reflecting an outdated understanding of a predictable relation between language, nation, loyalty and belonging, and for the underlying view of language and language learning (Bugge 2021), but also in particular for the social, legal and human rights consequences that the test results have for individuals (Oers 2014, Carlsen & Rocca 2021, Shohamy 2007, Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers 2020). Carlsen & Bugge (2021) analyze the public hearing rounds for the gradual introduction and tightening of language requirements in Norway, in which the proportion of negative responses in the public hearings increased, and in the hearing on the tightening of the requirements in 2019, 92 % of the responses expressed that they did not support the proposal (Carlsen & Bugge 2021: 207). No Norwegian universities or linguist science communities supported the proposal in 2019. The professional warnings revolved around both a fundamental question of the legitimacy of making basic democratic rights dependent on knowledge and language skills, and (especially in later consultation responses) the question of the appropriateness of the required levels.

Language tests (and KoS tests functioning as *de facto* language tests) of this kind represent particular challenges for adult migrants. A defining characteristic of adult migrants is their diversity, along a range of factors, including educational background (Gujord & Olsen 2021), and the tests represent a well-known risk of systematically excluding certain subgroups of test-takers, in particular low-literate migrants and refugees.

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<sup>3</sup> The earliest example of an objection to LADO tests is said to be professor of Urdu, Ruth Laila Schmidt’s expert work for the district court in Oslo in 1997, when examining the validity of linguistic analyses in a refugee case (Eades et al. 2003: 188, also personal communication with Schmidt, 9.11.2021).

## **Low-literate immigrants to Europe: Who are they?**

Though immigrants to Europe have been found to have a lower average education than the rest of the population (EU-OECD, 2016; OECD, 2019), immigrants with no formal schooling and limited print literacy are a minority among both migrants in general and refugees in particular. According to EU LFS in 2014, about half of refugees in EU had “lower secondary education” as their highest education (EU-OECD, 2016: 13, see also Groarke et al. 2020: 23). A more fine-grained categorization of levels of formal schooling in the migrant populations in Europe is still deficient, due to the lack of consistent routines for registering educational background, but also due to the basic problem of operationalizing the concept of both ‘formal schooling’ and ‘educational level’ (Browder 2019: The content, quality and organization of schooling varies greatly in the world, and as quantitative measures, ‘years of schooling’ may represent vastly different units in terms of hours, days or weeks spent in learning contexts. Estimates of the proportion of refugees arriving to Europe with no formal schooling, varies. Rich (2016) finds that approximately 7 % of refugees in Germany have “never attended formal schooling”, but that the numbers vary according to country background, accounting for almost 1/3 of Afghan, Eritrean and Somali born refugees. The proportion lacking functional<sup>4</sup> literacy is far higher, as it includes persons with some, yet limited, formal schooling, and persons who have attended school systems that tend to give low print literacy outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

On a global level, UNESCO estimates that, 773 million adults are unable to read or write “a short, simple statement on one’s everyday life in any written language”<sup>6</sup>. Lack of formal schooling correlates with several general patterns of discrimination: you are more likely to be deprived of basic schooling if you are a woman<sup>7</sup>, have a disability<sup>8</sup>, or belong to another oppressed or marginalised group, and these patterns are reflected in refugee populations in Europe (see Sivunen 2019 for an example from deaf asylum seekers in Finland). Systematic gaps in access to education are deepened by war and instability. In

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<sup>4</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/functional-literacy>

<sup>5</sup> This includes for example schools without resources for reading material and/or teachers, school systems that do not teach reading and/or writing (but focus on reciting) or schools that teach in a language that the pupils do not understand.

<sup>6</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/literacy>

<sup>7</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/gender-equality-education>

<sup>8</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/education-and-disability-analysis-data-49-countries>

an interview for the IMPECT project, “Khadija”, a young Somali woman in Norway, explained it like this (translated from Norwegian):

“Khadija”:	<i>You know where I lived if I went to school I had to walk past al-shabaab you know like al-qaida, yeah? And if they see you they want to marry you. Lots of girls had to marry them, they couldn't say anything. It is much better to have no school than to be married to an al-shabaab guy [laughter]. So I am indoors, indoors. But the boys they can go anywhere, like here.</i>
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In “Khadija”’s story, her lack of schooling is a result of a rational choice in a context where girls are unsafe from sexual violence by armed soldiers. In her new life as a young adult in Europe, she enjoys greater safety from the original threat, but her levels of literacy remain a barrier to achieving her goals in her current life, such as her goals to enter training to become health care worker, and her wishes to pass the language and KoS test to obtain a passport that would allow her a greater freedom of movement between countries. Grinden (forthcoming) shows how similar examples in line with Sen (2009) and Nussbaum’s (2012), may be read as deprivation of access to opportunities, such as of formal schooling and print literacy, translated into later unequal access to freedom, opportunities, and dignity.

**Educational background and its effect on test results from KoS tests and language tests**

From single-country studies, we see consistent patterns in the pass-rates in migrations tests related to test-takers’ backgrounds. *The Danish ministry of immigration and integration’s* analyses of the Danish KoS test of 2017<sup>9</sup>, find a significant effect of educational background on pass rates of the Danish KoS test: Only 22 % of test takers with secondary school or less pass the test (cf. 65 % of test takers with higher education). Unfortunately, the analyses do not differentiate between test takers within the group of the lowest education.) We also see that country background matters (24-25% of Somali and Iraqi citizen test takers pass, compared to a 90 % pass rate among German citizens),

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<sup>9</sup> <https://integrationsbarometer.dk/tal-og-analyser/filer-tal-og-analyser/filer-yderligere-analyser/Analyseomindfsretsprvenfranovember2017.pdf>

and, as a group, refugees are less likely to pass than other groups of migrants (27 % pass rate, cf. 60 % of labour migrants). Note that in such test taker populations, the dark numbers are likely to be vast, as potential applicants are deterred from entering an application process, due to self-disqualification and/or financial costs. (van Oers, forthcoming; van Oers 2022): The required language level for citizenship in Denmark is the academic level, B2, on the proficiency scale of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CoE, 2001, 2020) in all four skills, a level only achieved by 3 % of test takers in neighbouring countries, such as Norway<sup>10</sup> (Carlsen, 2017b). What are LESLLA learners' chances to reach this level of language proficiency? Carlsen & Hamidi (forthcoming) look at the test scores of a group of LESLLA learners who self-report having no prior schooling ( $n = 287$ ). Not surprisingly, the group performs better in oral skills (listening and speaking/interacting) than in written skills (reading and writing), but no test-takers obtain B2 in any of the four skills. Even if only oral production is required, as is the case in Norway, only 7 % manage to obtain B1, which is the language level most often required for citizenship in Europe (Rocca, Carlsen, & Deygers, 2020) and the level soon to be introduced in Norway replacing the current A2 requirement, which is achieved by 42 % of the learners of this group.

Gujord (in print/2022<sup>11</sup>) also finds consistent differences in the levels achieved in the Norwegian language tests for migrants, where test taker groups with lower education/reported years of previous schooling, also have lower test outcome<sup>12</sup>, and she finds in her literature review results in the same direction in all available studies (Gujord 2022/in print).

From the perspectives of education research, second language acquisition research and language testing research, both learner-internal and learner-external explanations have

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<sup>10</sup> The test-takers who managed B2 in all four skill were mainly highly educated individuals from Western societies, with a first language typologically close to Norwegian. The majority had lived in Norway for a relatively short time (1-2 years) when they took the test. The main motivation for sitting for the test was to apply for university admission.

<sup>11</sup> Gujord uses a dataset of 10,155 adult learners of Norwegian as the L2, who have taken an official test in the Norwegian language for immigrants, and who were asked to fill in a form with background information.

<sup>12</sup> The IMPECT project is currently compiling a data set with test scores and background data from approx. 70000 test takers from the Norwegian language and KoS tests, allowing us to investigate a) Which background variables give the highest contribution to the variance in test scores, and which learner groups are most likely to fail the language and/or KoS requirement for citizenship, and b) Which of the two tests required for citizenship (i.e. language and KoS test), that represents the biggest barrier for LESLLA learners.

been suggested for the low pass-rates among refugees and low-literate migrants (Carlsen & Deygers, 2019, see also Dewaele 2009, p. 24, for the internal/external distinction in SLA in general). Among factors that have been classified as learner-internal, are effects from previous literacy and schooling, and psychological factors that hamper learning and/or test performance. The lack of childhood literacy is found to have cognitive effects that impact later language processing (Kurvers, Craat & van Hout 2015), working memory (Demoulin & Kolinsky 2016), and processing speed (Ostrosky-Solis et al. 1998), and this affects the process of language acquisition, the learning and memorizing of the knowledge content needed for tests, as well as the development of adult literacy. Test takers with little or no schooling lack print literacy, but are also likely to lack in experience with testing itself and may experience the testing situation as strange or even absurd (Allemano 2013, Carlsen 2017). KoS tests often also presuppose other skills acquired through schooling, such as numeracy (cf. KoS questions of the type “what proportion/percentage of X...”<sup>13</sup>), digital skills, the understanding of drawings and figures, or they may presuppose knowledge and concepts connected to the school sphere rather than everyday life, and *educationese* patterns of problem-solving activities. This represents further obstacles to test takers with limited schooling. For refugees in general, we also see that trauma-induced symptoms affect short-term memory and prohibit concentration (for example due to trauma-related interference), which in turn directly impact conditions for intake of language input and language performance, including test performance. As an example, Johnsen et al. (2013) conclude in their literature review that verbal memory impairment is “the most consistent cognitive impairment related to PTSD”, a condition among other conditions impacting learning, which is particularly common among refugees (Blackmore et al. 2020). Health issues affecting learning and test performance may also stem from the integration process in the host country. In their investigation of integration and refugee health, the *Norwegian Healthcare Investigation Board* (2021) concludes that the requirements and pressure in the current Norwegian integration programme, can be detrimental to the health of some refugee groups, including refugees that were of good health when arriving to the host country (UKOM 2021:5). Adding to this pressure and mental load, is the fear of deportation and future

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<sup>13</sup> An example from the Norwegian online sample for KoS tests is the question “What proportion of Norway is cultivated land” (“Hvor stor andel av Norge er dyrket mark”), in a multiple-choice test with alternative answers reported in percentage values.



safety (Brekke et al. 2019), and concern for loved ones left behind in origin and transit countries (Djuve et al. 2017).

In the wider social context of the host country, Norton (Norton Peirce 1995, Norton 2013), Darvin & Norton (2014), apply the concept of investment to learners' engagement with and commitment to second language learning. Norton's investment concept builds on Bourdieu & Passeron's (1977) economic metaphor of forms of unevenly distributed capital and argues that learners invest in language "with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (1995: 17). Learners' investment in, and motivation for participating in the practices of the L2 classroom, is dependent on the extent to which those practices are regarded as helpful in obtaining desired future subject positions, imagined identity or access to imagined communities (cf. Anderson 1983), and thereby also on the extent to which other actors in the social context communicate that such future positions are indeed obtainable for the learner. LESLLA learners are rational adults and their willingness to invest could be assumed to depend on their expectations of outcome, for which the perception of the achievability of a goal is a relevant factor. A question in the case of low-literate learners' low pass rates in KoS and language tests for citizenship, is to what extent becoming a citizen is an important aspiration for migrants, motivating for language learning, or whether the requirements are considered a hindrance on their path to citizenship, which may then lead to demotivation and lack of investment.<sup>14</sup> Language investment theory highlights the dynamic and social nature of learners' relationship to the L2, contrary to an individualized notion of motivation as a dichotomous concept. Investment is thus connected to learners' identities understood as a person's "relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013: 45).

Explanatory factors categorized as learner-external, are found at the level of policy, research, teaching practices and test development. Most teaching material and practices in adult classrooms are based on learning theory from research on young high literate learners, often referred to as a sampling bias from young, high educated learners in or from WEIRD (western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic) countries (Henrich et

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<sup>14</sup> This is one of the aims of WP4 in IMPECT: <https://www.hvl.no/globalassets/hvl-internett/dokument/flki/impect/impect-prosjektbeskrivelse-oppdaterert-4.2.2021.pdf>

al. 2010, see also Ortega 2005, Tarone & Bigelow 2005, Young-Scholten 2013). These practices may be less suitable and efficient for other groups. To date, studies on low-literate adult migrant learners have mainly focused on the psycholinguistic characteristics of learners and pedagogy directed towards this group (Young-Scholten, 2018), presented in the first and second category. The larger socio-political context, including the policy of requirements for residency and citizenship, has largely been ignored (Nordanger, Carlsen & Bugge, forthcoming). To further widen the gap in access to language instruction, learners with lower print and digital literacy will have less access to resources for self-study than other groups. Language and KoS tests are rarely made with LESLLA-learners in mind (Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers 2020). Attempts to accommodate to low-literate and traumatized test takers in the construction and administration of KoS and language tests, often fail to take into account one or more of these different factors contributing to low pass-rates. As an example, replacing written tests with oral tests will meet issues with low print literacy but fail to address other issues within the same category (such as lack of test literacy), as well as factors hampering the learning process and individual performance under stress.

### **Language and KoS requirements and their impact on learning for low-literate learners**

The introduction of language and KoS requirements for citizenship is often legitimized by a claim that such requirements will increase migrants' motivation for language learning and integration (Strik et al. 2010, Van Oers 2014). Whether citizenship testing does indeed have these beneficial effects on language learning and integration is a question that can and should be investigated empirically (Mackenzie 2010). In the IMPECT interviews, we see that low-literate refugees on the other hand, describe the feeling of security as a precondition for learning. One such example is "Salman", a young Afghan man who came to Norway as an unaccompanied minor with no prior schooling. Through an interpreter, Salman explains how he feels that he only started to learn when he had received legal papers and felt safe, because:

“Salman”:	<i>of course, when you are not calm your thoughts are not calm, then you do not learn</i>
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When he arrived, Salman stayed for three years in a reception center not knowing if he would get deported. After these three years, he got a residency permit, and spent the following three years learning to read and write, completing primary and secondary school, and he is now entering vocational training. He works evenings and weekends, and in this manner, he supports himself financially. Salman is “integrated” in line with some everyday language definitions of the term. However, he has tried, and failed the Norwegian KoS test twice, and though he uses Norwegian to conduct his tasks at work and school, he has not yet passed the necessary Norwegian language test for citizenship. In the interview, Salman describes that citizenship for him represents safety, and through this safety also the prospect of one day getting married and one day starting a family. His learning curve prior and post the first milestone of safety (obtaining temporary residence), represents a problem for him, as he feels that he should have reached a higher level during his six years in the host country. He connects this to shame:

“Salman”:	<i>I lived three years at the reception centre</i>
Int. (Edit):	<i>Mhm that’s long long to wait</i>
“Salman”:	<i>For three years I did not learn as much as in the three years here in [LOCAL NORW. TOWN]- after I got to [LOCAL NORW. TOWN]</i>
Int. (Edit):	<i>mhm yeah</i>
“Salman”:	<i>So I can’t say to other people that I lived here in Norway for six years. If o- because if you live for six years in a place one must know the language uh properly. And I don’t know the language properly. I feel shame because of the language so I cannot say to people that I lived here for uh six years. Six years one must know the language one must have gone to school and finish school but I am not.</i>

Two aspects of Salman’s story are interesting for our understanding of the consequences of formal language requirements and tests for low-literate and vulnerable migrants. The first is Salman’s description of his learning curve, prior and post legal right to stay. This shift he describes, is in line with research on conditions for learning among vulnerable learners in general, where safety and stability is known to foster learning, and uncertainty and lack of safety hinders learning. There is also a learner-external side to this shift: His formal instruction was limited while staying at the reception centre, and his lack of literacy limited his access to self-teaching resources. During the interview he describes

how residents at the centre who were literate in their first language, were able to use “google”, “dictionaries” and “notebooks” to learn words.

The second aspect is Salman’s description of shame in not being able to speak the majority language “properly”. His self-evaluations of his language abilities are not connected to his daily linguistic needs: His Norwegian is sufficient to earn an income, to go to school, and to conduct everyday tasks, and could therefore according to folk evaluations of language skills have been coined ‘good’, or even ‘fluent’ (cf. Bugge 2018, for examples of patterns in needs-based self-evaluations of language abilities conducted by non-linguists). Salman’s conclusion that his language ability is insufficient (and shameful) appears during the interview to be directly linked to his own failure to pass the KoS and language requirements for citizenship. What is considered a sufficient language level for residence and citizenship varies in the European countries that have such requirements, from basic oral language skills, to a pre-academic language level in reading, writing, speaking and listening skills (Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers 2020). This large variation in which level is required, contributes to e.g. Böcker and Strik (2011: 182), Goodman (2011) and Goodman and Wright (2015) conclusion that the language requirements have a symbolic rather than functional role, that the variation in the requirement primarily reflects the temperature in the immigration debate (Khan & McNamara 2017: 454), or that the test results are understood as a measurement of the willingness to integrate (van Avermaet & Gysen 2009: 119).

A potential positive outcome of Salman’s self-evaluation would be for him to work harder, and through a future passing of the test experience a sense of achievement with positive effects for his learning in general. There is, however, a risk that Salman’s experience of current failure may lead to stress and anxiety, and thus be counterproductive to his further learning, for two reasons. The first source of stress is connected to his social status and self-image (whether current or as part of an imagined future self) as integrated and ‘successful’, which is potentially harmful for his investment in language learning (Norton, 2013). The second source of stress stems from the consequences that failing has to his legal status as citizen, in line with research suggesting that language and civic knowledge requirements represent a considerable cause of anxiety for low-literate learners from the Netherlands, Germany and the UK (Strik et al. 2010; van Oers 2014).

## **Consequences of language and KoS requirements for low-literate learners**

The decisions to link citizenship to passing formal language and/or civic knowledge tests are political decisions with little support in second language learning research and pedagogical research. Prior research into the consequences of formal language and knowledge requirements for citizenship, find that they first and foremost fulfil a gatekeeping purpose (Pochon-Berger & Lenz 2014). Studies from several European countries find that the most striking effect of the introduction of language and/or KoS requirements for citizenship, is a sharp decline in the number of migrants obtaining citizenship (Strik et al. 2010, van Oers, Ersbøll & Kostakopoulou 2010, van Oers 2014, Goodman & Wright 2015, Carlsen & Bugge 2021). Based on the effects of education and entrance reasons on pass rates, it is likely that the requirements represent a greater obstacle for low-literate test takers, for refugees and other vulnerable migrant groups.

An obvious consequence of failing the citizenship requirements is exclusion from full democratic participation, such as the full right to vote, as well as being eligible to Parliament. It also means not getting a host country passport, which may entail an exclusion from a degree of freedom of mobility between countries for labour, education and leisure. For many refugees, a host country passport equals the possibility to visit family in a home or third country. For refugees, a particular concern is that a citizenship usually represents a best possible protection against deportation (Brekke, Roland & Erdal 2019, Erdal, Doeland & Tellander 2018).

Hence, even if the intended purpose of language tests as parts of citizenship requirements is to motivate learning and foster integration, the result may be the opposite (van Oers 2010, 2014 Goodman & Wright 2015, Bech et al. 2017, Carlsen & Rocca 2022). Prior research indicates possible negative effects, and several reports call for more research into the consequences of language and KoS tests especially for those migrants for whom the requirements represent considerable barriers, such as migrants with low levels of literacy (Strik et al. 2010, van Oers 2014, Bech et al. 2017, Rocca et al. 2020). We hope that the IMPECT project will contribute to give new, and nuanced, insight into these questions in the years to come.

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