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Professional development of Syrian refugee women: proceeding with a career within education

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates professional development with Syrian refugee women teachers settled in Lebanon and Sweden. Both countries offer professional training programmes for migrant teachers, enabling them to proceed with their careers. The purpose is to investigate how moving to a new country calls for an opportunity to engage in practice development and the role digital literacy plays in the refugees' lives. We conducted interviews with twenty women in Lebanon and Sweden. The outcomes show that engaging in further career development is empowering and beneficial for strengthening and developing teaching and learning skills, and mobile literacy plays a role in overcoming the language barrier.

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1. Introduction

For refugees, one of the most important aspects of integration is education and training in order to be able to proceed with a professional career (Strang and Ager 2010). Here, integration is understood as transition into employment and appropriation of knowledge and skills of a new situation, which has the potential to restore self-esteem and encourage self-reliance. Maintaining an existing profession and entering into the labour market has potential to improve the well-being, not least for refugee women. Being a refugee can alter community patterns so that gender roles are redefined and displacement can give women refugees opportunities to assume new roles (Krause 2014). Jabbar and Zaza (2016) suggest that for women 'vocational training can increase self-confidence and self-esteem' (312). Also, 'women who were employed showed higher levels of personal well-being than those who were not' (Jabbar and Zaza 2016, 305).

Since the onset of the crisis in 2011, over 180,000 teachers and education personnel have fled Syria (UNDP, ILO and WFP 2017). This has caused severe consequences not only for the country being drained of teaching competency but also the displacement of the teachers who are separated from exercising their profession. The teachers have sought their way to Europe and to neighbouring countries, where Sweden and

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Lebanon, respectively, are two countries that have received the most Syrian refugees per capita. The situation around refugees maintaining a career is, thus, complex (Grzymala-Kazloska and Phillimore 2018).

There are many obstacles that prevent refugee women from pursuing their career, such as language issues, certification and traditions (Jabbar and Zaza 2016). However, women refugee teachers may be the only breadwinners in their families and thus need to find ways forward dealing with these barriers to become teachers in the host country. In terms of the context of teaching and refugees, there is limited literature on refugee teaching and teachers as forced migrants, which is the focus of this research.

2. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this case study is to investigate the professional conditions of Syrian refugee women teachers and the implications of migrating to another country. These conditions are both culturally and structurally challenging. However, forced displacement can imply an empowerment and a trigger to change of lifestyles (Krause 2014) where new ways of thinking can lead to finding further opportunities for professional careers, as well as having to rethink how to start a new career. This should be seen in the light of the great need of teachers catering for the large number of refugee children (Visconti and Gal 2018). National teachers are not able to cope with the large number of refugee children, which enables refugee teachers to take up the teaching profession to cater for the growing need of teachers in the host country. Unfortunately, many of these refugee teachers are unqualified to teach refugee children (Richardson, MacEwen, and Naylor 2018).

This research aimed at investigating the professional situation around Syrian refugee women teachers who were in a position of becoming teachers in their new country, participating in professional training practice. Thus, the study displayed professional development aspirations in the transitional role of first being a teacher in the home country and then proceeding with professional life in the new country. The project was a cross-cultural collaboration between Lebanon and Sweden, where refugee women with a teaching background were interviewed in the respective country. The rationale behind focusing on these two particular countries was that they had both accepted a large number of Syrian refugees during the past few years although they had entirely different approaches to refugees' work integration. The two countries had quite diverse settings in terms of laws and regulations around refugees/citizenship and how to validate existing professional backgrounds.

Digital literacy is commonly accounted for as a means to staying connected with the home country as well as a navigator in organising life and work in the new society. For professional development, technology plays an important role as a mediating device in new surroundings (Kaufmann 2018), for women and men alike (Bradley, Berbyuk Lindström, and Sofkova Hashemi 2017). In fact, digital literacy is supporting the situation around migrants to becoming stabilised in the new country. It is suggested that social media transform the nature of migrant networks, making it easier for aspiring migrants to make the next move (Dekker and Engbersen 2014), which also accounts for teachers.

Investigating the situation around Syrian refugee women teachers' professional development, the following research questions were addressed:

- How can moving to a new country call for an opportunity to engage in career development?
- What role does digital literacy play in developing vocational abilities to become professionals?

3. Background of refugee teaching context

Proceeding with a professional career through training is a way forward for refugees who are in the margin of being included (Osando and Billett 2017). Choy and Wärvik (2019) suggest that refugees' needs embrace learning in both classrooms and worksites 'that are socially and culturally foreign to them' (88). Refugee teachers' learning trajectories vary in terms of opportunities for learning, development and achievement. Underpinned by the practice tradition of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), professional development is in fact tightly connected to 'practice development' (Kemmis et al., 2014, 127). It is relevant to scrutinise how the teachers' practice is talked about, how activities are conducted in the practice, and how they relate to one another and others.

Concerning teacher training in Syria, university studies or a two-year programme at a teaching institute are required. For non-Lebanese teachers to be able to teach in Lebanon, a certification from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education is needed. Obtaining a work permit is problematic and therefore refugee teachers are experiencing difficulties in entering into the labour market. The language of instruction in Lebanese schools in most subjects is English or French. Arabic, the native language, is only used for teaching the Arabic language and social studies (Bahous, Bacha, and Nabhani 2011). In Sweden, on the other hand, anyone who has the necessary teaching qualifications, can enter into complementary teacher training programmes. However, even if existing teaching certificates are recognised and validated by the Swedish Council for Higher Education and/or The Swedish National Agency for Education, teachers are also required to take language courses in Swedish as a Foreign Language to be eligible to teach at Swedish schools. There are different entries with fast tracks for foreign teachers (Economou and Hajer 2019). If documentation is lacking, teachers can proceed with advanced Swedish language learning training equivalent to a Swedish secondary education certificate which provides eligibility for studying for a teaching degree at university.

4. Literature review

In the light of United Nations Agenda 2030, Global Goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs) (United Nations 2019), a number of the goals involve women in terms of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Goal number 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all and goal number 5, achiving gender equality and empowering all women and girls are two of the SDGs that are taking women's rights into consideration. Striving towards the human rights of all, education is a fundamental human right that will increase integration in society. Inclusive education also concerns refugees who lack consistent education due to war and conflict. Since lifelong learning

has an important role in meeting peoples' needs through life, regardless of gender, it is especially important that everyone has the opportunity to be able to become educated. Inclusion in the 2030 agenda also promotes the availability of qualified teachers.

There is a strong incentive investigating the situation around refugee women teachers since providing women equal access to education, and decent work, is suggested to increase sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large (United Nations 2019).

This section addresses research of refugee teachers' challenges overcoming structural barriers, such as legal and professional issues, as well as linguistic barriers. Further, the challenges concern obstacles when migrating to another country in terms of professional development opportunities and use of digital technology as well as hurdles for women refugees.

4.1. Structural and linguistic challenges

Refugee teachers have to overcome a number of challenges in terms of both structural and linguistic barriers, such as issues related to employment, professional culture (Niyubahwe, Mukamurera, and Jutras 2013) and differences in pedagogical and teaching practices (Abramova 2013).

The structural barriers concern eligibility for employment due to legal impediments. Since Lebanese labour law does not allow non-Lebanese to work without a work permit, most refugees work informally for subsistence wages without any legal protection from exploitation (Khater 2017). Barriers related to employment exist as well. Refugees are not always allowed to have a regular job and be paid. In Lebanon, a work permit is requested from non-Lebanese seeking jobs. Therefore, Syrian refugee teachers, most of whom do not have papers, teach in non-formal education settings. Some of the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in Lebanon provide professional development for Syrian adult refugees to teach Syrian children in informal settings (Greaves, Nabhani, and Bahous 2019). West and Ring (2015) reiterate that 'refugee teachers' credentials are frequently not recognized by the host country' (156). O'Neal et al. (2018) studied Burmese refugees in Malaysia establishing their own refugee schools. There is a policy in Malaysia against accepting refugees, yet the government does not intervene in setting up schools for refugees.

When refugee teachers are not allowed to work, they may lose their professional status (Smyth and Kum 2010). Ager and Strang (2008) argue that one of the major indicators for refugee integration and social inclusion is employment. However, in many cases there is dissatisfaction among refugees for not being able to exercise their profession. For instance, in a study by Charlaff et al. (2004), out of 523 refugees in Scotland, 41 were teachers or lecturers in their country of origin and none of them were allowed to teach in Scotland. Also, Lamba (2003) reported that deficient qualifications of refugees resulted in job dissatisfaction in Canada.

4.2. Language barrier

`The language barrier is another key challenge for refugee teachers since there are a number of aspects influencing lack of language and communication skills. In an ethnographic study with 67 refugee women refugees in Australia (Watkins, Husna, and Richters 2012), the participants described language difficulties as the primary issue

affecting their well-being, together with other factors such as gender, culture and socio-political factors are barriers to education. It is suggested that greater sensitivity of the backgrounds of the refugees is necessary and training is needed to sensitise educators. Majhanovich and Deyrich (2017) address the issue of lack of working knowledge of any of the official European languages with the large number of migrants from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. Consequently, language proficiency is suggested to be a priority since language is related to access to democratic processes and professional networks, and knowledge of certain languages will also enhance possibilities of employability. One solution to deal with the language barrier is to allow teaching in the native language in non-formal education settings of the refugees (O'Neal et al. 2018).

There is a connection between language skills and mental well-being with refugees as shown in Jabbar and Zaza (2016), where proficiency of English is an aspect that affects refugees' mental health. Those refugee women who had poor English skills were more distressed than those who did not (Jabbar and Zaza 2016). Nasser-Eddin (2017), explored how life changed in diaspora in terms of gender performance. Being exposed to a new society, in the UK, Syrian refugees wanted to preserve some of their cultural values but at the same time, Syrian women felt that they were provided with more power.

4.3. Professional development

Generally, refugee teachers obtain insufficient formal professional development training due to limited resources. To remedy this, frequently NGOs provide such professional development. Greaves, Nabhani, and Bahous (2019), for instance, state that in some NGOs in Lebanon, it is usually the coordinators who provide practical advice and professional development workshops for Syrian teachers. Most refugee teachers have to undergo an education relief training before being allowed to teach young Syrian refugees in public Lebanese schools in afternoon shifts (Khansa and Bahous forthcoming), catering for all children through double-shift schooling (Visconti and Gal 2018).

Smyth and Kum (2010) address the concept of reprofessionalising refugee teachers so that they are allowed to regain their status and teach. Some major traits of professionalism include being able to use one's specialised training and education and to have a recognised certification to be able to engage in the new society (Cheng 2009). Oh and Stouwe (2008) state that refugee teachers in Burmese refugee camps in Thailand are even encouraged to use non-authoritarian educational strategies as these work best in an emergency education environment.

4.4. Digital literacy

Digital literacy plays an important part in professional development of refugees as a means to communicate and learn (Bradley, Berbyuk Lindström, and Sofkova Hashemi 2017; Kaufmann 2018; Tossell 2017; Wall, Campbell, and Janbek 2015). As mobile phones have become ubiquitous, this has also brought an expansion of learning experiences through these devices (Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler 2019). For migrants, the mobile phone has become an inevitable device for communicating with their social networks in everyday life (Kaufmann 2018) as well as learning a new language (Bartram,

Bradley, and Al-Sabbagh 2018; Bradley, Berbyuk Lindström, and Sofkova Hashemi 2017). In Kaufmann (2018), refugees' mobile activities were investigated by interviewing Syrian refugees in Austria. Results showed that networked technologies are key tools for refugees who are both emotionally attached to and technically dependent on their mobile devices. In Bradley, Berbyuk Lindström, and Sofkova Hashemi (2017) a mobile language learning app for practicing pronunciation with newly arrived Arabic speakers in Sweden was investigated, showing benefits of breaking the ice daring to speak with locals.

It is suggested that mobile technology enhances possibilities for creating and sustaining both local and trans-local connections, since many migrants are transnational (Samers and Collyer 2016). It is in fact emphasised by Vertovec (2007) that access to cellphones is 'the social glue of migrant transnationalism' (54). There are a number of studies of digital technology connected to refugees and migrants. One such study is Tossell (2017) which provides insights into the use of smartphones by refugees in the Netherlands. The use of digital communication allowed refugees to ask for help, gain location details, and be warned about forthcoming difficulties, which helped them better plan to overcome challenges. Another study investigated how Syrian refugees were able to cope with insecurity and instability by using their mobile phones (Wall, Campbell, and Janbek 2015). Also, in a study of Haitian immigrants' use of mobile phones, social connections were examined, which showed how transnational ties were strengthened (Horst and Taylor 2014), since the use of mobiles allowed them to save time and complete their work. Further studies of well-being with migrants point out that; well-being is improved by mobile phones as migrants connect with their home and diasporic countries (Thomas and Lim 2010), physical and digital infrastructures are of the same importance to refugees (Gillespie et al. 2016), and technology is opening pathways to education for refugees (Dahya and Dryden-Peterson 2016).

Economou and Hajer (2019) studied Syrian refugee teachers engaging in a so called fast track, where complementary education was provided to become teachers in a Swedish context. The participants' understanding of the role of becoming a teacher in Swedish schools was investigated. One of the differences addressed between Sweden and Syria was the diverse physical context in terms of IT resources, such as computers and smart boards in Sweden, where in Syria such resources were scarce. The results of the study showed significant development towards more participation-oriented approaches to learning.

4.5. Women refugee teachers

There is a plethora of research on gender issues, but scarce research when it comes to refugee teachers and even less to women refugee teachers; the data that exist are mainly at the local level (Richardson, MacEwen, and Naylor 2018). Marchand and Runyan (2000) relate the numerous ways women are involved either actively or passively in accommodation acts and globalisation issues that can deceive and/or empower them (Kirk 2010). Kabir and Klugma (2019) reports on a study conducted in six countries regarding the pay gap to refugees in general and female refugees in particular. The results show that women refugees are much less paid than male refugees and locals in these six countries. Unfortunately, even when these refugee women are permitted to work legally, they face discrimination acts. Richardson, MacEwen, and Naylor (2018)

add that refugee teachers cannot be paid a salary in some countries (e.g. Turkey and Lebanon) because of the labour law that exists in these countries. They can either volunteer or receive incentives.

5. Methodology

To investigate the vocational trajectories of refugee women on their way to becoming practicing teachers in their new home country, we conducted field study observations and face-to-face interviews (Merriam 2009) with Syrian refugee women in both Lebanon and Sweden. Our method draws on narrative analysis (Morrice 2013; Riessman 2008) to understand how attitudes and experiences of the respondents, social interactions, systems and processes were enacted.

5.1 Participants and data

The participants were 20 Syrian women, 10 in Lebanon and 10 in Sweden, all teachers in their home country. Interviews took place between October and November, 2018. All participants were refugees according to UNHCR's definition from 1951, implying a person who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence (UNHCR n.d.).

5.2. Recruitment process

The recruitment was conducted through teacher training and education centres for refugees in their country of destination. Snowball sampling was applied to find participants within the target group (Kaufmann 2018), where participants proposed further participants to be recruited from their teacher training and education centres (Leurs 2017). In Lebanon, teachers were recruited from an NGO that offers non-formal education to Syrian refugee children. The same procedure was applied in Sweden, where a teacher training centre for foreign born teachers was approached. When reaching the desired number, 10 participants in each country, interviews commenced.

The respondents were from different places in Syria, aged between 24 and 54, with an average of 36 years old. They had arrived in the country of destination with their closest family. Arabic was the first language with all but one who had Kurdish as the first language (though fluent in Arabic). The majority spoke a second language, 12 claimed they spoke English (one fluent, seven with basic skills, and four with beginner level), seven spoke basic Swedish (all were respondents from Sweden), one claimed to speak average French, and, finally, five spoke Arabic only (all were respondents from Lebanon).

5.3. Interviews and translation

The interviews were semi-structured, audio-recorded and conducted in Arabic. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the research team in Lebanon and counter-checked by one of the researchers in Sweden, who is Syrian. The Arabic speaking researchers were fluent in English. The transcripts were then translated into English in order to conduct the analysis with the entire team, who were not

all Arabic speaking. The two research teams in Lebanon and Sweden first analysed the transcripts separately. Then, the two analyses were compared to ensure that the content and voices of the respondents were preserved in the translation process. The transcription and translation were done manually. It was not feasible to use any translation software services, since the participants used different accents in Arabic and sometimes standard Arabic was used. This procedure catered for accuracy in understanding of the respondents' meaning.

The interviews concerned the refugees' experiences that guided them and their future career aspirations. This approach is based on discourse analysis of life trajectory narratives (Budach and De Saint-Georges 2017) of providing a voice to minorities. The respondents were asked in-depth questions connected to their backgrounds and choices of paths in professional life. The same questions were posed in the two respective countries. The interviews covered four main areas: (i) languages spoken and countries lived in; (ii) digital literacy; (iii) professional outlook, and (iv) future career plans. The analysis focuses on professional dispositions in the two interview sites and the development of educational practices.

Ruling ethical guidelines in the two countries of study were followed. All participants gave their informed voluntary consent for participation in the study. Anonymity was emphasised in the consent form as well as the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time. The names of the participants and other revealing material facts have been altered to preserve the anonymity of each participant. One person (from Sweden), decided not to participate for private reasons, since she was soon to retire.

6. Analysis and results

The respondents were all from Syria, although currently living in Sweden and Lebanon (see Appendix, ID 1–10 Sweden and ID 11–20 Lebanon). In the Appendix, the disciplinary belonging, education, current situation and future aspirations are accounted for. The respondents acknowledged language skills as an important means for inclusion in the new society, although not being asked specifically about the language of the new country. Recognising language requirements for working as a teacher in the new countr and accessing language is as much a way to be able to describe experiences. Those who were in Sweden stated that they were considering practicing further Swedish and those in Lebanon stated they would like to learn French as part of their vocational training.

Although there was a span between 2009 and 2017, most of the respondents (14) left Syria between 2013 and 2015. The ten respondents in Lebanon had been staying in Lebanon all the time and the ten respondents in Sweden had lived in transit countries on the way to Sweden, apart from one person who had come straight to Sweden. These transit countries were mainly Arabic speaking countries, Kuwait (2), United Arab Emirates (2), Lebanon (2) and Egypt (1) Saudi Arabia (1), but also Turkey (2). Two persons had been living in two transit countries before arriving in Sweden.

6.1. Communication with locals

We wanted to find out what the situation was like around the respondents' connection to locals. Although the respondents communicated with locals in their professional training

practice, only three persons claimed that they had natural encounters with locals on a regular basis outside of their practice, six respondents spoke with locals 2–3 h per day, eleven respondents only spoke very little with locals, and three stated they never spoke with locals (one in Sweden and two in Lebanon). Those who did meet locals gave examples of places where meetings happened, such as coffee time, Sunday activities, school, work, and informal meetings in the neighbourhood. Staying connected with persons in the new country was considered beneficial to be included in a new society, something professional training practice can facilitate.

6.2. Digital literacy in a professional context

Regarding digital literacy, the respondents were asked about their digital usage for professional purposes in general and for language learning specifically. All respondents were active digital users, primarily smartphones, which they all owned, which corroborates findings in our previous research (Bradley, Berbyuk Lindström, and Sofkova Hashemi 2017). The phone was used as a mediating device to engage in various activities for self-directed learning and as a tool to use in professional learning of teaching and learning methods. To the question about digital activities connected to teaching, all respondents were engaged in activities on their mobile phones. The respondents provided 33 activities that they performed regularly on a daily basis connected to their professional training, some of which were quite extensive and time-demanding. Particularly, engaging in social media and surfing the web were activities that required quite some time online. Categorising the activities into themes, though somewhat overlapping, the distribution was: participating in *Social media* groups for teaching and learning (12) such as Facebook, *Watching videos* (7) either following YouTube learning channels and other streaming services, *Surfing the web* (5) for information about new teaching methods and learning activities, *Making calls* (5) and *Communication* (5) with teacher colleagues via communication services, such as WhatsApp, Viber, imo, and Messenger. Further activities mentioned were *Translation*, *Reading articles,* and *Songs* (4). In sum, the respondents claimed to be digitally active, suggesting a number of common activities that they engaged in connected to their own practice development on a daily basis. It should be noted that the activities were the respondents' own suggestions during the interview and they were not provided with any examples of activities. Likely, if being provided with options, the proposed smartphone activity usage would be even more extensive.

Another aspect that displayed digital literacy connected to training is that all but one respondent had used the phone to learn a new language. However, they had not been using a language learning programme to learn the language methodically, but instead used the phone in other ways. This is in line with Rosell-Aguilar (2017), suggesting that language learning apps are just one type of app used for language learning, together with social media, dictionary and translation services. The respondents claimed that they use or had used no less than 37 applications and resources for language training. The resources and apps mentioned for language learning were the respondents' own suggestions. The answers could be divided into different categories, according to Rosell-Aguilar's (2017) framework; Language learning (8), Apps used for but not created for language learning (6), and Dictionaries and translation apps (20). There was also a fourth category Surfing the internet for language training (3) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Digital applications and resources for language learning.

Categorisation of resources & apps	Resources & apps mentioned	Number of responses
Apps for language learning	Duolingo, Memorise, Sayhej, Harvard University app for learning English, Språkplay, Melody, the American English Application, English with Disbeta	8
Apps used for but not created for language learning	YouTube, TED talks	6
Dictionaries and translation apps	Google Translate, Lexin, Translator, Translate application, Dictionary	20
Surfing the internet	Swedish web, Swedish text, Google search for new teaching strategies and activities	3

6.3 Professional experience and outlook

The respondents were keen to share their experiences both in terms of practical items in the new country but also teaching related activities with others, primarily with other newly arrived persons in a professional context. To the respondents, the gender aspect played a minor role and being part of a professional context took precedence over gender. The respondents were focused on looking ahead at how they could proceed with their teaching career in the new country rather than looking back.

Regarding professional outlook, the educational background of the respondents displayed a highly educated group; ten with university degrees; Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS), four had interrupted university degrees, and six had obtained a teaching qualification in attending a programme at a two-year institute (see Appendix with overview of participants' background, current situation, and future aspirations). Two of the six attending the two-year institute had interrupted university degrees and had therefore carried through their teacher training programme by means of the two-year institute. Eighteen respondents had education certificates from Syria, one had a certificate from Saudi Arabia, and one from the United Arab Emirates. There was a rich variation in the respondents' educational discipline. Sixteen had degrees in humanities and education and four in other disciplines; Informatics and libraries, Pharmacy, Business and marketing, and Electrical engineering. Six respondents pointed out that they had applied for a governmental competition in Syria to be employed as a teacher.

The respondents claimed that different reasons had driven them to become teachers: Sixteen knew early on that they would like to become teachers, and they were still very positive to the profession. Two mentioned that they had no choice but to embark on a teacher profession although they had wished to get another profession. One said that her age was the cause for becoming a teacher since another discipline she was interested in required an age limit; and finally, one abstained from responding to this question.

Four of the respondents had previous work experience, prior to their teacher training, working in other lines of business; one as a social worker specialist, one in farming and within confectionery, one in accounting, and finally one as a housewife.

The sixteen respondents who were positive to teaching chose teaching because of an interest in teaching a specific subject (7), teaching as an activity, that is, working with pupils and dealing with kids (5), or because the grades allowed entering teacher training (2). In addition, two of the respondents claimed teaching as an option to get an academic job when growing up in a rural region. This is the quote from one of these women. (All quotes are translated from Arabic):

> I loved to be an educator because it is in contrast to my cultural environment where everyone works in farming and agriculture. So I wanted to have a different style of life. (Respondent from Lebanon)

The following two quotes display positive voices concerning choice of teaching profession:

> I applied for a governmental contest (Ministry of Education) in Syria. I was accepted and got my job in the educational-teaching field. (respondent from Lebanon)

> My passion for teaching is the only reason behind my job as social and educational professional. (Respondent from Sweden)

However, there were also obstacles expressed in the way of performing the profession due to migration, exemplified in the following quote:

> I graduated and didn't have a chance to work because I moved directly to Sweden. (Respondent from Sweden)

Since teaching is exercised globally and can be performed formally in schools as well as informally in for instance temporary NGO settings, there is a constant a call for teachers. The teachers in our study displayed a keen interest in exercising their profession after migrating, whenever opportunity was given. 12 of the respondents engaged in work shortly after arrival to the new country. They had managed to find a temporary teaching position without the ample language requirements. The following two quotes are examples of statements from the respondents' engagement:

> I was a volunteer at the ABF center for the Syrian refugee kids (4 months) in Sweden, then as an official employee for (6 months). (respondent from Sweden)

> I taught in Sweden for three months only. In Lebanon, I taught English classes for adults. (respondent from Sweden)

Concerning future plans, the participants were asked about their current career situation, what they anticipated proceeding with their professional life and how they were planning for that.

6.4. Teaching as a career choice

The results show that teaching is a stable profession in the sense that it can be transformed into a new context. The majority of the teachers' aspirations were explicitly expressed in terms of working as a teacher in the new country (14) (see Appendix). The teachers could relate to the community through interacting and learning together and sharing competences with each other as colleagues in the new community (Lave and Wenger 1991). This increased the aspirations to obtain their teaching certificate and being able to progress with teaching. In addition, two respondents with interrupted studies wished to complete them, and one respondent wanted to set up her own school, which is in line with the idea that forced displacement can cater for new opportunities (Jabbar and Zaza 2016). However, two of the respondents wanted to change career paths entirely in the new country. They expressed interest in working in nursing or a dental lab and within tailoring.

The respondents were open for further training and would like to get career training to proceed developing their teaching skills. Nine of the respondents already had a high account of additional professional training apart from their teacher education; five in the new country where programmes had offered training, four (now located in Lebanon) had got sizable training in Syria before leaving, and one in Kuwait (now located in Sweden). The other ten had less complementary training compared to their colleagues.

Different options of professional development training in the new country were mentioned, such as attending training sessions and workshops on teaching and curriculum building and to trial teaching in class with students. Further training was offered with NGOs in Lebanon and with Swedish complementary teaching programmes for migrants and refugees. Whenever an opportunity was given, the respondents attended workshops related to new methods of teaching, active learning, and classroom management, which showed that there was an interest in staying updated with the state-of-the art in the teaching field.

7. Discussion and conclusion

This case study investigated Syrian refugee women teachers' aspirations around their current and future careers. Teaching is an equal profession in the sense that it attracts both men as well as women and the United Nations (2019) specifically underlines gender equality as a vital sustainability goal and education as a fundamental right for all. Our respondents conveyed a sense of empowerment being able to proceed with their careers in a new society. Teaching is a profession with the same aim in all countries: providing education. In the wake of the large migration of refugees from Syria, there is a need of more teachers with an Arabic speaking background, teaching the large number of children who are also migrants. The two countries have accepted a large number of refugees, Lebanon and Sweden, nevertheless with diverse conditions for career development. However, it turned out that the situation around their career was quite similar. Thus, the job market is profitable for teaching in both Lebanon and Sweden. However, at least one second langauge was required to be able to teach.

7.1 Progressing into a new culture

The situation around refugees maintaining a career is super-diverse, complex, and changing as suggested by Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore (2018). The first research question concerned how moving to a new country called for an opportunity to engage in career development. Maintaining a career after migrating and progressing into a new culture with that career, may cause refugees to take opportunities to assume new roles and career paths. Although only two respondents specifically stated that they would like to change careers altogether, proceeding with the career in a new environment would entail new challenges. The practicalities around teaching was of major concern for the respondents in terms of how teaching is talked about and organised in the new country and how the career can be catered for in terms of development and further training in networking with others. It turned out that the respondents were generally positive in trying to maintain their careers by engaging in professional development activities, likely since teaching is a stable profession which can be transformed into a new

context. However, the respondents also claimed that the differences in how teaching is organised in the new country are challenging to overcome.

The respondents were all teachers from their home country and at the time of the study they were participating in complementary training programmes in their new country to be able to proceed working as teachers. However, the certification and language barriers were obstacles that the respondents needed to overcome. In Lebanon, laws prevented non-Lebanese to work without a work permit. Further, it was very difficult (if not impossible) for Syrian refugees to obtain a work permit. Thus, refugees who have some education opt to teach in non-formal education settings for a living. In Sweden, on the other hand, there were only practical obstacles for a refugee to be able to work as a teacher, such as having enough language skills and validated paperwork. However, the Swedish Migration board can issue a temporary consent making it possible to work before a residency permit has been obtained by the authorities. In Sweden, migrant and refugee teachers become part of the regular school system and are included as teaching colleagues with the other teachers in school.

7.2. Proceeding with a professional career

The teaching practice is a context where refugee teachers can feel familiar and thus comfortable although being in a social and culturally foreign work site. Focusing on a career can redirect the focus from traumatic experiences to a constructive activity at hand. Reasons given for choosing a teaching career were expressed in terms of appreciation: to be a teacher, teaching, children, and being in a school environment. Some respondents stated that the teaching path was not chosen, but a result of circumstances, such as grades from the secondary school and purposeful life choices. The respondents were very keen on seeking professional development of their teaching skills. Maintaining a professional career is also suggested to be increasing self-confidence and self-esteem of women, which this project was set out to explore (Jabbar and Zaza 2016). Proceeding with a professional career, such as teaching, provides stability when being transnational (Samers and Collyer 2016). It turned out that the women continued with their teaching professions not long after moving to a new country, providing a sense of belonging in the new environment.

In both countries, language was an obstacle. Although the national language in Lebanon is Arabic, there is a long tradition of French and English being teaching languages and in Sweden, Swedish is the national language. These impediments caused some teachers to start re-thinking their career paths. Smyth and Kum (2010) bring up the concept of reprofessionalisation, allowing refugee teachers to regain their status. However, reprofessionalisation with our respondents implied moving into a career as teachers in the new country or a new career. Although the respondents were open to sharing experiences in terms of professional learning, this sharing was largely focused on their own circles with fellow refugee teachers in their communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).

7.3 The role of digital literacy

Outcomes concerning the second research question show that digital literacy plays a central role for refugees in developing vocational abilities to become professionals.

Our results corroborate Kaufmann (2018) that mobile phones are used for learning about the new society and professional life. The respondents' digital literacy scaffolded informal learning and professional development activities in the new country. Also, learning the language, which was claimed to be an important activity in the new country was learned through a number of mobile applications. In terms of professional development, engaging in IT related learning activities with computers and smart boards for example, can encourage learner centred and less teacher focused approaches with pair and group work in the classroom. This implies switching from teacher-centred education to active student participation learning processes brought up by Economou and Hajer (2019).

8. Limitations and future research

A case study provides an in-depth and detailed examination of a subject of study, in our specific context with insights into refugee women teachers' professional situation. The nature of a case study is focusing on a small size and thus our sample does limit what can be claimed in terms of generalisations. However, the voices of those interviewed provide rich descriptions, which contribute to a topic that serves to be highlighted.

Interviewing a number of persons in their mother tongue (Arabic) and then translating it into another language (English) calls for a discrepancy in exact wording of voices in the interview. To come to terms with this, we transcribed all interviews in one place, with the researchers in Lebanon and then conducted the analysis jointly so the outcomes could be verified.

The women refugee teachers agreed to be interviewed. However, the majority did not have legal documents to be in Lebanon, so for confidentiality and security reasons, their names were kept confidential, and we could only meet them once, i.e. during the interview. The participants from Sweden, on the other hand, are part of a network of foreign born teachers, where there is a clearer transparency and communication between the participants.

This study has focused on the voices of the refugee women teachers, their backgrounds, current and future aspirations. In future studies, it would be relevant to also investigate the transformation of a profession into a new teaching environment when moving into a new country, such as differences in pedagogical and teaching practices (Abramova 2013). It would also be favourable moving back to the women to see if they were still in teaching after some time and to follow up on the women in a longitudinal study. However, on a final note, drawing attention to women's professional development, we would like to contribute to the understanding of how teaching can serve as a profession that can build self-confidence and well-being with refugees.

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Appendix

ID	Original discipline	Education	Current situation	Future aspiration
1	English Language	Two-year institute	Studying Swedish language	Nursing or dental lab
2	Educational Psychology	BA	Studying Swedish language	Educational field
3	Educational Psychology	BA	Studying Swedish language	Teaching
4	Women's vocational training	Two-year institute	Working as a tailor	Working as a tailor
5	Childhood Education	BA	Studying Swedish language	Teaching
6	Arabic Language	BA	Studying Swedish language	Teaching
7	Informatics and Libraries	BA	Studying Swedish language	Teaching
8	Class teacher	Two-year institute	Studying Swedish language	Teaching
9	English Language	BA	Studying Swedish language	Teaching
10	Music	Two-year institute	Studying fast track for teachers	Teaching
11	Pharmacy	Two-year institute	Working in kindergarten	Teaching
12	Arabic Language	BA	Working as an Arabic teacher	Teaching
13	Electrical Engineering	BSc	Working as administrator	Not clear
14	English Language	Interrupted BA	Working as a teacher	Teaching
15	French Language	Interrupted BA	Working as a teacher	Teaching
16	Business and Marketing	BS	Working as an English teacher	Establishing her own school in Lebanon
17	Psychology	BA	Working as an teacher	Teaching
18	Education	Two-year institute	Working as an teacher	Teaching
19	Arabic Language	Interrupted BA	Working as an Arabic teacher	Completing my BA
20	Education	Interrupted BA	Working as an teacher	Completing my BA