



Teacher education is a deeply pedagogical process rooted in values, ethics, and the social purpose of schooling. Globally, it sits at the core of educational quality and fairness, as research in comparative and international education demonstrates: the training of teachers directly influences students' learning chances, social inclusion, and the democratic aims of schools. Teachers are not simply transmitters of curricula, but active professionals whose convictions, reflective skills, and ability to manage the complexities of classroom life give shape and substance to the educational experience itself.

The pedagogical dimension of teacher education frames teaching as a relational, context-aware, and ethically grounded profession rather than just a set of procedural skills. From a research perspective, this demands robust research methodologies that can critically examine the complex realities of schools and inform evidence-based policies. Equally important is the connection between theory and practice, which helps to bridge the persistent gap between universities and schools.

The contributions gathered in this volume reflect the richness and diversity of experiences showcased during the ATEE Spring Conference 2024, held at the University of Bergamo from May 29 to June 1, 2024. The volume presents 70 selected papers out of more than 300 presented by researchers representing over 40 countries.

This broad spectrum of studies highlights promising directions that can inspire renewed inquiry and concrete proposals aimed at improving contemporary educational systems.

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ATEE Spring Conference 2024

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Teacher education research in Europe: trends, challenges, practices and perspectives

May 29th - June 1st, 2024
S. Agostino, Bergamo



Edited by Nicole Bianquin and Francesco Magni





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BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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Università degli studi di Bergamo

2025

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS ATEE Spring Conference 2024. Teacher education research in Europe: trends, challenges, practices and perspectives / Nicole Bianquin, Francesco Magni (edited by) - Bergamo: Università degli studi di Bergamo, 2025

ISBN: **978-88-97253-27-3**

DOI: [10.62336/unibg.978-88-97253-27-3](https://doi.org/10.62336/unibg.978-88-97253-27-3)

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<https://aisberg.unibg.it/handle/10446/309209>

An event organised by:

Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali, **University of Bergamo** // www.dsus.unibg.it

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The contributions published in this book of proceedings have been evaluated through a double-blind peer review process. We would like to thank the members of the Scientific Committee, as well as the many other professors, researchers and experts who agreed to act as reviewers.

Global awareness and professional teacher competence through student mobility from Norway to Zambia

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Abstract

This paper is part of the project "Teacher in a Globalized World", where we, through qualitative interviews, analyse the long-term effects at least five years after their student mobility from Norway. At Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, teacher students have been privileged to study Global Knowledge, a 30 ECTS subject, as part of their teacher education. How do five Norwegian teachers describe their professional development and global perspectives as teachers many years after a three-month stay in Zambia as part of the subject Global Knowledge? Some key findings include the importance of relationships, intercultural communication, the positions as Norwegians and global awareness as professional teachers today.

Keywords: student mobility; Norway; Zambia; global awareness and professional teacher.

1. Background and introduction

This article is part of the project “Teacher in a Globalized World. Long-term Impact of International Practicum on Teacher’s Professional Development” (LIP), which includes five teacher education institutions in Norway. Through a minimum of five qualitative semi-structured interviews each, we investigate the long-term impact on student mobility. This paper is based on the experiences of former teacher students from Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and their long-term impact after a three-month stay in Zambia.

The Norwegian educational core curriculum is based on core values such as human dignity, identity, and cultural diversity, critical thinking and ethical awareness, the joy of creation, engagement, and the urge to explore, respect for nature and environmental awareness, as well as democracy and participation (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). Can student mobility be a strategy to equip teachers to be professional teachers following our curriculum?

Since the first government white paper on internationalisation in higher education in Norway was published (St.meld. nr. 14 (2008–2009)), the national educational authorities have emphasised the importance of internationalisation and student mobility. While the first white paper in 2008 argued for student mobility from the Global South as part of a global responsibility to reach our shared goals, which allowed us to invite about ten students from Zambia each year to our program, the arguments in 2020 (Meld. St. 7 (2020–2021)) emphasised student mobility from Norway to enhance global awareness, motivation, work relevance and personal growth (Bergersen et al., 2022, Massao & Bergersen, 2024). It is argued that exposing students to an international setting abroad can increase (a) students’ intercultural competence, (b) students’ global awareness, and (c) the quality of the educational programme. (Meld. St. 7 (2020–2021)). As a result of Norway's policy on internationalisation in higher education, we developed a tailor-made subject, Global Knowledge, for students to acquire intercultural competencies, professional skills, and global awareness.

Through the elective subject Global Knowledge (30 ECTS), Norwegian and Zambian teacher students, preschool teachers, and social workers have yearly from 2008 to 2016 done a course with four weeks of theoretical and practical preparations, a three-month internship in Zambia/Norway and two weeks of reflections and summing up after their stay abroad. As a shift in Norwegian policy, Zambian students were no longer granted, and the program continued with Norwegian students only from 2017 to 2025. Some of the long-term impacts of student mobility on Zambian teachers in Norway are published in Bergersen & Muleya (2019). This project is based on interviews conducted with Norwegian students at least five years after they spent time in Zambia. All participants completed the course alongside Norwegian and Zambian students in the same classroom.

The learning outcomes in Global Knowledge are, among others, (a) To develop global awareness through global perspectives, (b) To be able to communicate interculturally and reflect on your background and (c) To be able to implement experiences abroad professionally. While in Zambia, they undertake 4 to 6 weeks of teaching practice, fieldwork, and empirical data collection for their projects and attend lessons and discussions with local lecturers, students, and mentors. Research on the impact of student mobility has emphasised surveys and interviews with students shortly after they mobility abroad (Bergersen et al, 2022; Vande Berg et al., 2012), as illustrated in the different articles in Bergersen et al (2022) about student mobility among teacher students in Norway and my research on former Global Knowledge student after their stay in Zambia (Bergersen, 2013; 2017; Bergersen & Massao, 2022) and Zambian students after their stay in Norway (Bergersen, 2017, Bergersen & Muleya, 2019). Generally, students express personal growth and a reframing of their perspectives. Still, in this project, we aim to delve deeper into the impact of their international stay as teachers after a few years, when the initial excitement has waned. Do they shift perspectives from the individual to the school and societal levels over time, as Zambian students did in research on the short-term and long-term impacts of student mobility?

My research question is: *How do five Norwegian teachers describe their professional development and global perspectives as teachers 7-12 years after three months in Zambia as part of the subject Global Knowledge?*

2. Methodology

We employed a qualitative interview research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers from five Universities in Norway developed a joint, semi-structured interview guide comprising 15 questions to facilitate comparisons and independent research from each institution. As a team, we have conducted 25-30 interviews following the same interview guide, with the following main topics: descriptions of the most critical impact of the stay and teaching practice abroad, how the stay has influenced the teaching about global and intercultural questions, and how they think their stay in Africa has made them better professional teachers. We asked them to provide examples of substantial experiences they recall today as essential and describe if and how they have reframed their perspectives.

This paper is based on five individual interviews with Norwegian teachers and former Global Knowledge students who spent three months in Zambia. In February 2023, I conducted five digital interviews via Zoom, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. The selection criteria were former teacher students with teaching experience in Africa and at least five years of teaching experience in a Norwegian school. Only five former students were qualified, and fortunately, they all agreed to be interviewed and share their experiences with me. As a lecturer for the same teachers, I had to consider ethical aspects and a power imbalance during the interviews. I highlighted listening to their interpretations and experiences as thick descriptions. Consequently, some of the interviews lasted longer than planned.

The respondents are five female teachers with five to ten years of experience. They had their mobility to Zambia from 2012 to 2016, and all of them had fellow students from Zambia in their program in Norway. They are all in their late twenties to mid-30s and teach Languages (4), Social sciences (3), Religious studies (3), Maths (2), and Physical Education (3) from grade 6 to grade 11. The interviews were recorded and transcribed into text. The anonymity of the participants is valued, and contextualised quotes are reformulated and translated into English.

In our joint project, we analysed our data using Wilson's (1993) model of international experiences adjusted to teachers and professional development. Wilson's model identifies substantive knowledge and perceptual understanding as key components for gaining global perspectives, as well as fostering personal growth and intercultural connections to develop *self and relationships*. I have revised the model to make it more relevant to teachers and student mobility today. In a proposed new model, gaining *global awareness* encompasses key elements, such as perceptual understanding and ethical responsibility. *Developing global responsibility as a professional teacher* requires intercultural communication and professional development. See Table 1 for more details.

Global awareness/ Professional teacher	Perceptual understanding	Ethical responsibility
Intercultural communication	Context and social structures	Power, position and dignity
Professional development	Reframing perspectives	Prejudice, SDGs, decolonial

Table 1: global awareness and professional teacher

Based on Wilson (1993) and my revised model, the data were analysed, and two key areas of teachers' *global perspectives and awareness* were identified: their position as Norwegian students in Zambia and new reflections on Norwegian cultures. In analysing *professional teachers' competencies*, key areas were relations and communication, global responsibility as a teacher, and acknowledging diversity.

3. Theoretical framework

Recently, Norwegian research (Klein, Bergersen & Larsen, 2022) suggests that Norwegian teacher students experience personal growth and increased reflection shortly after their student mobility to African countries. Global awareness and more profound reflections on power imbalance and white privilege are rare, with a few exceptions (Bergersen & Massao, 2022; Juul-Wiese & Adriansen, 2019; Massao & Bergersen, 2024). This paper incorporates decolonial perspectives (Mbembe, 2022; Mignolo, 2021) to shed light on colonial structures, power imbalances, and the question of whether and how students can disrupt a colonial mindset and Western hegemony (Quijano, 2000). The Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP), as described by Quijano (2000, p. 256), is a system of power that represents the extension of Western domination through four interrelated domains: economy, authority/politics, gender/sexuality, and *knowledge*. The CMP is often forged into educational concepts, such as modernity, humanity, development, and democratic ideologies; in a neoliberal way, Western ways of knowing continue to occupy the master, superior, and central positions. Decolonial theories of position and white privilege (DiAngelo, 2011) are also added to analyse Norwegian students' roles in Zambia and their reflections as teachers many years later. In another project using decolonial lenses, Massao and Bergersen (2024) emphasise the voices of colleagues in Zambia who receive Norwegian students and their critical perspectives on privileged white Norwegian students, as well as how student mobility can be a form of what Lessenich (2019) describes as *global recreation colonialism*.

A didactic and educational perspective has been added, incorporating Klafkis's (2014) theory on *Bildung*, which emphasises self-awareness, independence, citizenship, and solidarity as key elements for both learners and teachers. This also aligns with critical pedagogy and Freire's (2000) theory, which emphasises thinking with and not for, and how false generosity from North to South often reproduces colonial structure even when intentions are good. Reframing perspectives and being aware of ethical and global injustices as professional teachers, the pedagogy of discomfort (Boler & Zembylas, 2003) and the willingness to view education as a risk (Biesta, 2014) are also integral to the theoretical framework presented in this paper. According to Portera (2021), a "cultural" shift in the minds of teachers and students is necessary for acknowledging diversity. Do our students acknowledge diversity and pluriversal knowledge (Mbembe, 2022; Naudé, 2019) and act as globally responsible teachers after teaching experiences in another context?

4. Findings and discussions

Empirical data from five respondents are analysed using a revised model of global awareness and responsibility as a professional teacher, along with my research question and theoretical perspectives.

4.1. Global perspectives and awareness as teachers

In analysing the transcripts of data from five interviews, two main areas will be presented as key to how they portray their reflections on global awareness as teachers some years after they left Zambia. The first is their position as Norwegian students in Zambia, and the second is their new reflections on Norwegian cultures and pluriversal worldviews.

They all recalled experiences and reflections on being different from the majority, and some reflected on their privileged position as white and Norwegian. Some quotes can illustrate their reflections. Like teacher 1: "One of the things I still remember as important is *the experience to be different*. That helps me to understand how minorities can experience being in Norway". Teacher 5 also mentions being different, but she had another reflection: "We could visit nice hotels, and I felt bad that we were privileged to do something very few Zambians could afford to do". Teacher 3 remembered how schools were more hierarchical, with

strict roles and respect, and her experience reflected this: "I learnt to be humble and less know-it-all as I used to do. That gave me a deeper understanding of my position as a Norwegian student and differences in how we communicate".

Both teachers 3 and 4 explicitly mentioned being a white student in Zambia, and teacher 3 described her experiences like this:

«I can still recall my bodily experience to be white and different. I felt guilty for having access to so many materialistic things and being so privileged when I was there, but I still, 10 years later, reflect on global injustice and how I, as a teacher, can make a difference. Returning to Norway was difficult; after opening your eyes, you can't close them when you reflect on global injustice and how we in Norway behave. »

Similarly, teacher 4 described her reflections on being white:

«I still remember the discomfort of being white; they called us Muzungu, and we discussed what that meant, positively and negatively. To be white and different, you could never hide; all you did could be seen. On the other hand, we felt we were looked up to and were responsible for being good role models even though we didn't want them to copy us. »

This aligns with DiAngelo's (2011) and Bergersen and Massao's (2022) discussions of how white privilege is often neglected or denied as relevant to majority members. However, as experiencing being a minority, awareness of positions and white privileges might appear essential and can lead to the reframing of perspectives and disclosing global injustice.

Another key finding is how they, after many years, reflect on Norwegian cultures and worldviews. They all mention how their perspectives have shifted from viewing Norwegian society and culture as superior to reflecting on how this harmonious image is cracking in contrast to another culture. The teachers reflected on how Norwegian society emphasises materialism and self-centeredness in contrast to collectivistic hospitality and humanity. Some quotes can illustrate their reflections today: Teacher 1: "Norway is so materialistic; I try to consume less and repair things as they did". Teacher 4 incorporated a more decolonial aspect and global awareness by saying, "I feel a bit sick being here at the top of the "money mountain", knowing we have and still do exploit the resources in Africa." Teachers 4 and 5 reflected on what we can learn from other cultures when teacher 5 mentioned: "The hospitality we met is rare to find in Norway, the Ubuntu philosophy and how much they care of us all. We are too self-centred in Norway", and teacher 4 followed up with:

«The importance of hospitality for society is to take time to see people around you. Also, to see the importance of respect as care, to acknowledge wisdom and knowledge in contrast to the freedom and minimum of rules in school and society for Norwegian learners. »

The same teacher also reflected:

«Seeing corruption in Zambia made me more aware of the corruption in Norway as well. Still, we don't talk about it here. »

From the teachers' reflections, reframing their perspectives allows them to see Norway, Zambia, and global student mobility as more than just individuals communicating in classrooms. At least three teachers can reflect on how societies are structured, how core values such as togetherness in Ubuntu (Naudé, 2019) contrast with Western rational hegemony (Mbembe, 2022; Bergersen, 2017), and how the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000) continues to create global injustices. How do such insights and global awareness influence their role as teachers in Norwegian classrooms?

4.2. Professional teacher competencies

All five teachers emphasised intercultural communication as one of the most essential competencies they achieved and skills they use as professional teachers today. Teacher 2 expressed:

«Communication and relations are key elements of being a professional teacher. I did not learn much about it in my teacher training, so I am glad we had both intercultural communication theories and practice in Global Knowledge. As a teacher, I utilise this competence daily. »

Teacher 4 recalls: “I still remember the importance of communication, dress code and respect in different cultures and how we discussed this in the classroom in Norway with the Zambian students before and after we travelled,” and teacher 3 said: “I learnt the importance of communication, verbal and non-verbal and how to dress and I am not wearing any short skirts anymore as a teacher since I know many can be offended”. Teachers also reflect on how they need intercultural communication competence to cooperate professionally with all parents, colleagues and learners in multicultural schools. As teacher 1 said: “We have experienced being in a new context, not understanding their local language or norms, so we are more aware of our body language and time spent to explain things properly”.

Intercultural communication is a key element of being a professional teacher. It is more than communication, dress code, and awareness of a Norwegian low-contextual communication style. Being globally aware of the power imbalance, social position, and access to free speech at both individual and societal levels is an essential skill for any teacher. Experience firsthand in a Norwegian classroom with fellow Zambian students and later in Zambia during their three-month stay, being ignored as a young female student, and observing how hierarchical structures are reproduced through communication has given them cause for some critical reflection. Teacher 1 emphasises the importance of not taking democracy, gender equality, a welfare state, and the ability to speak in public for granted.

Have their experiences in Zambia been eye-opening in terms of being globally responsible, ethical, and a changemaker? From analysing their answers, it becomes clear that few teachers can provide adequate examples of didactics built on *Bildung*, as Klafki (2017) refers to it, which emphasises solidarity, self-awareness, and global citizenship, potentially leading to learners and teachers becoming change agents for a more socially just and sustainable world. Teacher 4 said:

«I use my world perspective to help my learners to think more globally than locally to reduce their self-centredness. I discuss coloniality with my Grade 6 learners, and it is my responsibility as a teacher to disclose our colonial history. »

Teacher 1 emphasises: “It is important for me as a teacher to give my learners different perspectives and be aware of sustainable development. We all have different experiences, and tolerance is the key.” She addresses both global awareness and the importance of embracing diversity, implementing this in Norwegian classrooms in line with decolonial perspectives (Mbembe, 2022) and the need to disrupt universal and Western hegemony. Teacher 3 pointed out, “In the Social Sciences, I always emphasise that we need to think globally to develop and learn from each other’s knowledge and perspectives.” The same teacher pointed out the danger of generalising and prejudice:

«Diversity and differences in cultures are also within a country, rural versus urban, gender and socio-economic, both in Zambia and Norway. It is crucial to view personalities as separate from culture, both as a teacher and a learner. Learners are usually very tolerant, so discussions with fellow teachers are also crucial if we want to make changes. »

In their daily work as teachers in Norway, they recall theories learnt from the subject Global Knowledge, discussions in the classroom with Zambian students and experiences from their three-month stay in Zambia, as teacher 4 mentioned:

«I use my competence from Global Knowledge and my stay in Zambia in all I do with my learners, in my choice of examples, global awareness and political consciousness, not only in language and social studies but as a teacher in general. My embodied knowledge of our ethical responsibility in a global world cannot be ignored as a professional teacher. All teachers should have international students in class and stay in another country for at least three months. »

When the teachers provided examples during interviews, they realised that their student mobility had changed them more than they were aware of. As Teacher 1 said, "We are part of a bigger world, and we all play a part. My role is to use my knowledge and experiences to make a difference for a better future." Unfortunately, none of the teachers' intercultural competence had been acknowledged by their headteachers, so implementation of change might take time.

5. Summing up and conclusion

To be a professional teacher in Norway, core values are emphasised, with cross-cutting areas including life skills, democracy, citizenship, and sustainable development. These correlate well with Klafki's (2014) Didaktik and Bildung theory, emphasising the aim of education to enable learners to make their own decisions, be responsible citizens, and develop solidarity skills.

Both teachers and learners should be able to recognize and react when oppression (Freire, 2000) and social injustice appear. Experiencing a different society, learning environment, and context through student mobility might give teachers the competence to practice more just education. My findings in this research are in line with the discussion in Bergersen & Massao (2022) that Norwegian students seem to use student mobility for personal growth and to acquire intercultural communication and competence skills, while Zambian students, after a stay in Norway, emphasise theoretical knowledge, learning strategies and to learn from Western epistemology. If student mobility from Norway to Zambia has no long-term impact on a teacher, we might continue to reproduce colonial structures, as discussed in Massao and Bergersen (2024) and promote global recreation colonialism (Lessenich, 2019). In the project with long-term impact on Norwegian teachers, all five participants reflected on the importance of being prepared before their stay in Zambia, including discussions with Zambian students in Norway and incorporating mobility into 30 ECTS subjects, which included practice and fieldwork for three months. Despite this, not all teachers critically reflected on their position as privileged Norwegians. They argue that we should be humble and show respect through appropriate communication in personal encounters. Still, mainly, those teaching in social sciences were able to reflect on a global and societal level and answered differently from short-term studies (Bergersen et al., 2022).

According to their voices, the long-term impact of five teachers' three-month stay in Zambia suggests that a few gained global awareness and professional teaching skills, as outlined by Klafki (2014), Freire (2000), and the core curriculum (2020), through student mobility and the subject of Global Knowledge. Teachers found it challenging to discuss their stay in Zambia independently of the subject. Some argued about the need to have theoretical knowledge before, during and after their three-month stay in line with Vande Berg (2012), to understand the global structures or the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000) and understand the need to discuss racism, white privileges, exploiting and global responsibility in their classrooms in Norway to disrupt unconscious colonial mindset (DiAngelo, 2011; Mignolo, 2021).

Higher education institutions in Norway are responsible for involving both the sender and receiver academically with appropriate preparations, follow-up, and reflection after student mobility to reduce the reproduction of colonial structures and construct universal knowledge (Massao and Bergersen, 2024) that makes a difference as teachers. As Portera (2021) argues, teachers' and learners' mindsets need to change to embrace diversity as a necessary and valuable resource. I argue that all educators and educational institutions must disrupt their colonial mindset and recognise that education is never neutral (Freire, 2000), including ethical considerations regarding student mobility.

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